

Regarding Evil

by

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B.F.A

The Cooper Union School of Art, 2002

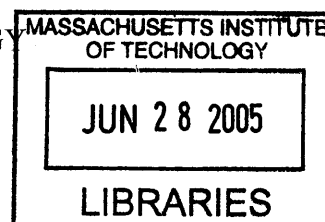
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FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

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REGARDING EVIL

By

ROSS B. CISNEROS

Submitted to the Department of Architecture
On May 6, 2005 in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in
Visual Studies

ABSTRACT

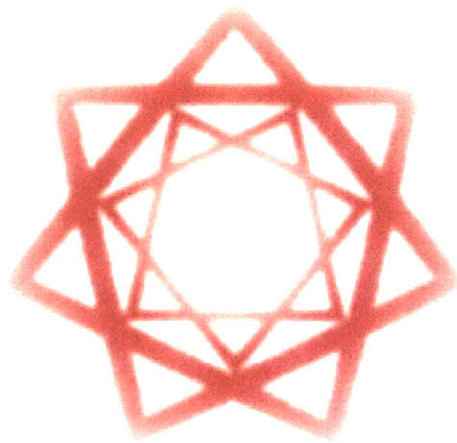
The transnational summit, Regarding Evil, was called to assembly with the simultaneous sounding of the trumps in six sites around the world, projected simulcast. In collaboration with the six individuals who were issued the instruments, each announced their particular state of emergency and converged at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology with a seventh blast. Scotsman Kenneth Smith assumed the role of 7th piper.

Artists and scholars of international reputation had been invited to present visual and discursive material confronting the elusive and immeasurable subject of Evil, its transpolitical behaviors, charismatic aesthetic, and viral disbursement in the vast enterprise of simulation, symbolic power, and catastrophe. Panel discussion and audience participation provided a public forum to expand this dialogue.

Engaging in the discourse of ethics as a codal system by which we can only hope to define a subjective good, continues to undermine the intelligence of Evil and fuels the perpetual orbit around exotic 'otherness' as an opaque foreigner situated in an archaic Other World of saboteurs. Questions that I have raised concerning the usefulness of colloquia and the discourse of Moral Law included "How then can we speak to/of evil while choosing to sidestep the subject using rhetorical strategies at the risk of sacrificing symbolic power?" "Must we rely on the performative death act to regain this symbolic power?" Including ourselves within the equation of Evil is necessary for a richer appraisal of our condition, which may, in some cases, require the invocation of such an unwanted guest directly into our universe.

Thesis Supervisor: Krzysztof Wodiczko

Title: Professor of Visual Arts



HOW TO READ THIS MANUAL

As with any performative or ephemeral works of art, the methods of documentation and (re)presentation often become a second curatorial process in transposing the experiential into archival forms of souvenirs and written accounts for the physical archive of memory. This text serves such a function and should usher the reader through the events of the summit Regarding Evil under the following headings:

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PREAMBLE

If the purpose of a thesis is to leave behind a record or trace of a particular course of research for others to reference, then I find it appropriate to include an account of the serendipitous encounters that led me to the subject Evil. This preamble should be useful in understanding that the question should not be why I chose to investigate Evil, but rather how it was demanded of me. At some level, the passageways towards my final undertaking at MIT may seem disparate and will read more as a narrative than a technical form of scientific writing that describes a problem, experimentation, and subsequent results. Among the variables that arranged the larger constellation were the challenging political activities that began after September 11th (or the political habits that were now operating with hyperbolic strength), was the resurgence of both fundamental religiosity and Gnostic traditions, a failing counter-culture to ruling power, and the effects of being an artist placed in a technocracy of mythic scale. Each of these effects created an environment of study that was site and time specific as my pursuits as an artist took me from one contradiction to the other- contradictions that depend on negation but in my own artistic practice, operate in cooperation with elliptical thinking.

From the position of an artist, placed in the context of a technical institute, I had experienced the temptation of chasing after the Genius of mind and measure, to imbue this mythical genius into artworks, and exhibit the results of my hunt as if they were the hides of exotic animals. There was no honor in this method of control and did not reveal the prophetic capacity artists have in revealing mystic truths. After my first semester at MIT, I immediately enrolled in Harvard's Divinity School in a desperate attempt to save my heart from the machines and prove my optimism for transformational experience outside of measurable traditions. I found myself fighting especially hard to assert myself as an artist and a poet amongst hard-line architects, mathematicians, and theorists while seeking allies among theologians, artists, mystics, and the Rosicrucian Order. To my surprise and delight, The Order had an incredible presence at MIT and an ancestry that has since been chiseled into the stone of the buildings to read: BACON, NEWTON, and EDISON among others. Members of the Manhattan Project were initiates of the Rosicrucian Order, and before becoming fully absorbed into the project, were required to perform the secret rites held in what was once the "Rad Lab" since demolished and replaced with Frank Gerry's Stata Center. With this discovery, a very important aspect of my relation to technology slipped into place. It was clear to me that the technological advances that have had the most impact had their beginnings in the discipline of metaphysics and transcendental philosophy. To be more specific, the revelation that technologists had as a starting point a vast vocabulary within transcendental philosophy, poetics, and metaphysics led me to believe that there was a more primary art to be practiced and mastered that could be understood and shared across various disciplines.

The course of my investigations regarding the transcendental aspirations of art, religion, technology, and philosophy were also crossing heavily into politics and organizing strategies for the masses. If The Communist Manifesto is to be considered the great artwork of Marx (as it should), than the politics of George W. Bush and his administration should also be considered a political design center considering the future

global arrangement of religion, economy, and ideology. The most impressive and vulgar strategy of the current American political agenda as spoken by the president has undoubtedly been the inclusion of language suggesting a war between a transcendental Good and transcendental Evil. This political program made it all too easy to justify protective measures in bordering 'God's chosen people' from the bestiary of strangers. Evil has again returned to the simple Manichean design that draws power from its very opacity, luring people away from a moral center and into an illusion contrary to truth and against the will of people. This structure is known to define Black Magic and the Dark Arts. Can the very inclusion of such terms have the ability to invoke such transcendental Evil? Or, is it part of the frail human condition that commits an error in believing in the immortal capacity to touch transcendental power?

There was a particular day during the summer of 2004 that gave me a sense of urgency to confront the subject of Evil, real or fantasy, in a more direct way. I had just spent my first summer as an amateur organic farmer on a 1740 agricultural property. My relationship with academic life, farm animals and the brute force of tilling the earth brought me closer to the brotherhood of The Concord School as defined by this very specific triangulation in New England that resulted in the transcendental concerns of American intellectuals Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Alcott, and Fuller. Continuing in this American Gothic tradition of New England, I had learned that the previous owner of farmhouse was a self-made witch after having received several mailings to her attention related to sorcery and spell casting. Against all logic, every residual evidence of her habits in the house fell suspect to voodoo or ritual. Drawings, objects, and bones, all teased the supernatural tendencies of the imagination. Again, to make a case for serendipitous revelation, the supernatural origins of the Atomic Bomb, my proximity to Salem Massachusetts, religious fundamentalism, and my studies of sacred texts at Harvard were all aligning themselves and fell hard and fast on that defining day. The radio was on and our president George W. Bush kept repeating the words "Evil", "Freedom", "Thugs", and phrases like "Culture of Life", and "Evil Doers". All of this sounded so absurd and absolutely off my planet given my rural responsibilities at the time. In a subsequent report, the Pope was suffering from illnesses that had the Catholic Church preparing and anticipating his death. I had become quite an expert in anticipating and being tuned to death that summer. Many friends died from various causes and were always in synchronicity with the death of a goose. If a goose died, a friend died and I buried a goose. The natural sensitivity to death that comes with animal husbandry is worth mentioning here in that it helped with the planning of the Summit. I chose the weekend Pope John Paul would die and the first task I undertook for this event was to preemptive compose a brief, respectful eulogy, and present it for the audience. This was a priority for two reasons. One being, to disarm any assumptions that I had the Devil on my side and killed the Pope- and secondly; just in case the Devil thought I *was* on his side, there would be a clear message that no such alliance would be made. Despite these efforts, I was flooded by emails claiming I had ushered in the death of the Pope and that 'A New Dawn' was afoot.

Nothing of great consequence came out of this prescient moment other than to have set up an unusual contradiction among audience members who gripped the front

page of a newspaper showing a dead Pope while listening to Boyd Rice yell “Do you want to throw out Christ?” To begin, I relied on what were the more popular examples of Evil that I could identify with. Charlie Manson of the US and the Nazi lead Holocaust in Europe were the two that surfaced first. On the farm, a consideration for the natural predator and its associated violent act to take life is cause for securing the barn but is never thought of as warding off Evil. Charles Manson was a predator indeed, but he was not considered a natural predator and forgiven for being true to natural law. In fact, there is no room for natural predators within the moral structure of society- and when they appear; they are almost always considered Evil incarnate. One of the many troubling strategies the Nazi party employed in the rise to power was an aesthetic master plan. Uniform, march, graphic design, public speaking, theatrical assembly, and the myth of Total Empire and empowering order. This myth, as repulsive as it may be for some, continues to fascinate and attract others. There is a man who seems to have taken on each of these popular Evil’s and re-appropriate them to build his own personal mythology. Boyd Rice, satanic priest, former friend to Charles Manson, and musical pioneer of noise/industrial folk was such a person. I began my correspondence with him in December of 2004 through a series of letters, emails, and telephone conversations. One simple requirement in gaining the interest and respect of a fascist is to know more than they do about themselves and their history. The neo-Fascists are desperate for leadership and melt at any sign that somebody may be taking them seriously. For a neo-Nazi or neo-fascist group to exist, they require a party, a population, and a transcendental cause that is total. Without these requirements, the neo groups go on with volatile insecurities. However, there was still something to be learned from them and the part of *them* that is in each of us. I made it a requirement to invite them to my thesis presentation- not directly, but by luring them through Boyd Rice. Knowing that Rice had relations with Charles Manson, he was able to put me in contact with him at the State Penitentiary in Corcoran CA. Matthew Barney came next in my line-up of presenters. Remembering back to the theme of serial killers in his Cremaster 5, I felt he had successfully seduced the masses with an aesthetic that stirs the libidinal desires for blood, sex, murder, animalia, and the body in pain. Barney’s grammatology of symbols that pervades his work is far from opaque as some would like to believe- it is part of an allure that is tied to the desire to be initiated into his cryptic universe. It is also, in part, the desire to enter into the perverse hell of Hieronymus Bosch or the fantasies of Sade. I decided to make it a requirement that Matthew Barney exhibit his canonical stature as an artist to attract the masses and reveal the weakness most have for the aesthetic of secret pleasures that include diabolical power. So far, I had collected the iconic power of a mad man killer, Boyd Rice complete with a Neo-Nazi following, and the iconic power of Matthew Barney with Evil as the lure- a preposterous subject. The subject became second to the power of adjacency each had to one another. Jodi Dean came next. I had learned that she was lecturing on the topic of Evil as it is connected to the rhetorical strategies of the current president George W. Bush. Dean also had written extensively on feminist subjects and seemed like a good person for Boyd Rice to sit next to. These arrangements began to resemble the dark Victorian seating chart of a perverse host. Throughout the course of this party planning, I was in constant contact with David Kaczynski, brother to the UNIBOMBER Ted Kaczynski. David had wanted to

participate but had an important meeting with New York State representative regarding the death penalty- of which he is strongly opposed. Our conversations were mostly on the topic of ethics and the moral dilemma of turning in family over to the police. Kaczynski would later validate my position that he did not in fact use ethical processes, but rather his non-cognitive moral sense as Hume would describe it in Book III of his *Treatise*. Our discussions led us to various topics of morality, gnosis, and the clairvoyant capacity of the feminine (Cassandra), as it was his wife who had a ‘gut feeling’ about his brother Ted. Julian LaVerdiere and I shared a very specific experience together in New York. I had been working as a studio assistant to him and was the first to call and inform him that the planes that hit the World Trade Center was a terrorist attack. I was neighbor to an FBI couple who within minutes told us it was not an accident as many thought at the time of impact. Julian’s girlfriend at the time was a high ranking member of New York’s Municipal operations and would call in with horrifying reports of carnage and trauma- the parts we did not see on televisions. We prepared inflatable dinghies to be launched at a moments notice into the Hudson River if a quick escape was necessary. We began to see 11th avenue as an ideal place for the studio- close to the waterway escape route. As things unfolded, and the patriotic fever caught on and pervaded the nation, Julian was offered the opportunity to design a temporary memorial to the Trade Center that was *The Tribute in Light*. Julian and I shared the primary experience of balancing oneself while the seismic political and ideological shifts began reconfiguring our knowledge. I remember the harsh criticisms against the project Hans Haacke made whenever he had the chance claiming that it was glorifying capitalism. Whatever its function was in the end, it is recorded ubiquitously in the millions of tourist photographs and pizza shops as a melancholic reminder of our most beloved collapse. Ronald Jones had a strange reputation as a ‘bridge burner’ and often resulted in odd, sidelong glances from women when I would mention his name. It is still very unclear why he invited such a strange response from people, however his students always had an equally uncanny allegiance to him. Ron’s interest in the problems of death by design as explored in his work Caesar’s Cosmic Garden peaked my interest and would further be increased by his involvement in Kosovo as an “Artist Without Borders”. To complete the assembly of participants, I began writing to students at various universities around the globe and asked for their participation. I had been sculpting horn-like trumpets out of wax, petroleum, and crude oils and included them in several video projects. I mailed editions to the available participants around the world and asked them to be played at exactly 11:00am EST calling to session the summit Regarding Evil. Six horns were mailed and the seventh and final blast was taken on by Kenneth Smith- a Scotsman bagpiper in full military regalia who played *The Kings March*. In the following pages, the reader should find my opening statements, the submitted texts from some of the participating presenters, email correspondences, media attention, and photographs of the event. A conclusion will follow this documentation and briefly outline current the activity connected to the fallout of the summit. The project is still unfolding, and we are all still learning.

QUARANTINE

The site requirement for the summit Regarding Evil needed to include aspects of “enforced isolation or restriction of free movement imposed to prevent the spread of contagious disease” and define a “period of time during which a person, idea, or material suspected of carrying a contagious disease is detained under enforced isolation”. A captive room would help in testing the audience for civil endurance given the stark ideological differences among them. One of the larger lecture halls at MIT was reserved and could accommodate 400 people. This location provided an array of multimedia technologies that helped in the presentation of visual lures on three screens and surround sound by Bose Corporation. The hall was near capacity for six hours.

SITE

Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Building 10, Room 10-250
Free and open to the public

CALL TO ORDER

Untitled

Forever forward and backward
In my index and preface,
We bargained
And I became of worth to you.

I am the map and the deed.
The border and the passage
The section, this word, you owe me that.

It was my gift to you,
But one to many.
Though your tongue was so precious and I would keep it warm.

I was the divide and the harrow,
Flax, bed sheet, persuasion, justice.
The minister spoke of justice and love.

I trembled in through your throat and had everyone believing.
You saw me as the butcher,
And yes I am the butcher
And yes the architect
And yes the ghost.
The performer, the ether, twilight, and the violet hour.
I am the promise
A promise borrowed,
A promise lent.

Text By: Ross Cisneros
Read By: Vito Acconci

During the summer of 2004, I had returned to writing Gnostic sermons and poems after a four-month period of rest. For historical purposes and biographical accuracy, I should mention that the inclusion of such agrarian imagery did not rest heavily on nostalgia- but rather the direct result of my own agricultural experiments. Indeed, the alignment of ludite fantasy, belief in an omnipotent Other, and an interest in the pulpit, led me on a search for my minister. Vito Acconci was such a person whose aura of truth through speech and performance was demonstrated in likeness to great ministers and orators. We met in New York City in the Fall of 2004 and recorded this poem in his Brooklyn studio near the Manhattan Bridge. This poem was the first sounds to be amplified and open the summit.

INTRODUCTION

The Pope is Dead.

So as not to bulldoze ahead without due respect, we will acknowledge that Pope John Paul II had the tremendous burden of power, and that he often used his religiosity and political influence towards the betterment of society. We can focus on the other details of his papacy at some other time. For now, let us pause and reconcile this moment of incredible proportion as millions grieve the loss of their Pope and must bravely reconsider the future of the church.

Good Morning I am Ross Cisneros and I welcome you. Many of you have traveled a great distance to be here and participate in today's Summit, and each of us will put forward our best in making every moment count. I imagined this day to be an artwork that had the possibility of extending beyond the normal or conservative realms of colloquia- and beyond the limits of this house, this space. An artwork that would show that this *gathering* around such a challenging subject, would prove itself to be an example of the hope we have in understanding our human condition and would hone our spiritual edge as we would in a church. This is no new agenda for us today. From the moment language was designed we have continued to design and re-design concepts of Evil in our universe. It was *the hope* Language had in the possibility of revealing the TRUTH, the hope in arranging once again the language of Adam, to transcend the curse of Babel, and to reveal the code that contained the true name of God.

My hope for this summit, is not so much a hope for discovering such absolutes, for solving any one particular problem, but rather- to learn a bit more about how we engage language and speak *of* Evil- How we behave with regard *to* Evil- whether we believe Evil to exist at all. Speaking for myself, the more I deny its existence, the more it seems to harass me. I knew full well the risks involved in presenting myself adjacent to this Evil- and yes to be harassed- not by the logically fit, but the more dangerous kind of critic who becomes lost in the opacity of Evil and vilifies its closest neighbor. For this reason, I must make my position clear from the start for those- not familiar with my work or my position, to avoid any pre-emptive emotional strike against this program.

I am not in praise of Evil. I do not take this subject lightly. I am not in praise of the spectacle that curses- the machine of the image world that is as dangerous a weapon as artillery itself- I am not in praise of narcissism that contaminates the true hope of ethics- however, to be fair, to be ethical, I have included and investigated these territories at great risk- to bring it out in the open, and continue in the productive tradition of colloquia in academic institutions.

To begin this process, I felt I needed a wise clergy. Our guests- authors, artists, and scholars, are united not by way of particular interest- but rather, the general problem of Evil that for one reason or another, has tracked them down and has demanded their attention. Today we have as our guests Political Theorist, Jodi Dean, professor of political theory at Hobart and William Smith Colleges. Ronald Jones, artist, writer, and

one of our most important educators. Julian LaVerdiere, artist, well known for his part in creating the Tribute in Light World Trade Center Memorial. Boyd Rice, satanic priest, author, and musician. World-renowned multimedia artist Matthew Barney has contributed his recent film project De Lama Lamina to be screened in 35mm. Charlie Manson, was invited to participate and is currently indisposed. Though he has written and his correspondence with me will be read in lieu of *his* physical presence. A more thorough and descriptive introduction for our guests will be made preceding their presentations.

At this time, it is important that I describe what we have just experienced on screen and in the space as it is not without a great deal of courage and dedication from these remote participants that they were able to join us- I will try to dissipate any obscurity that may interfere with the full appreciation of their efforts.

We began with a piece of writing that I had presented to Vito Acconci when I was searching for its performative voice- as I searched for a minister that had mastered the craft of oration. The text was for me an expression of a moment- briefly felt when the polarized world of my conscious experience became a single dynamic order. I was turning over the earth, the goats were whining, the Pope was sick and the radio reiterated...War, Evil, Diplomacy, Hope. This nodal point where the additive and subtractive powers converged is where the Pleroma, the fullness of life, can be appreciated and acknowledged as beautiful. In this Pleroma, all are invited- *all* have been given a place at the table- *all* can act as their own advocate in declaring one's self. Every villain has the chance to debunk the mythology that vilifies. It was from this image of totality that I began sending out advisories around the world inviting people of differing positions to participate in the sounding of the trumps for the summit Regarding Evil.

In Jerusalem,
And in Cairo,
And in Rome,

In Babylon
And in the Yucatan
And in a prison over in Corcoran CA

These participants were each issued a horn. To those locations where it was impossible to mail the object- I instead, mailed the plans for it- a simple pattern on how to make a suitable cone so as to maintain symbolic power. I invited their annunciation, their warning, their demand- and, since language had failed for them in the past (or put them in danger)- they agreed that a siren- a wail- declaration *without* language- would afford them an opportunity to be here and heard

Each player announced, in effect, a belief in a particular truth. In this way, the horns are the horns of heretical preaching, the horn that splits the rock, the horn that punctures knowledge and brings light back into the cave.

I would like to thank the following individuals and academic institutions that made this initial collaboration possible. The University of Baghdad and Falah Mhmed, The American University of Rome and Peter Grismond, Consuelo Ruiz-Vega, Charles Manson and the Corcoran State Prison of California, Bezazel Academy of Art Jerusalem, and Wakalat El-Ghouri- Al Fustat. And of course, The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which proves time and time again to encourage research of any form without censor. This institution is not without exceptional people who helped fund such projects, see them through, and offer critical insight while encouraging individuation through research.

I would like to thank Alan Brody Provost of the Arts, The Council for the Arts at MIT, the Large Event Fund and Artis Arnold III, Michelle Oshima, ZOZ and the voodoo group. Mary Haller & Patti Richards. For encouraging and investing themselves in my proposition- Joan Jonas, Krzysztof Wodiczko, Muntadas, Joe Gibbons, Pia Lindman, all from the Visual Arts Program at MIT. Special thanks to artist Oliver Lutz for teaming up on this effort and many special thanks to Sharon Benedict who generously donated her time to see that this happen.

Ethics comes in for the rescue mission in a moment of moral frailty when the vocation of being human lacks the required fitness, a morality tied to the fitness of one's character towards the Good. It is my position, that this moral Law cannot be known through the available traditions of religion, of politics, through the courts, or through science- it must come from a particular state of knowing, in the archaic sense of the word, a Gnostic mastery over the self in relation to others. Here, situated in a place of knowing, we are not presented with the ethical questions of "What is the *RIGHT* thing to do" or "What is the *WRONG* thing to do", but rather the more impressive self-reflexive question "What is *THE* thing to do". It is from this position that one may transcend the confines of a polarized world of Good verses Evil or, as *ethics* often posits, the lesser of two Evils. I declare, that to be beyond Good and Evil, one must also be beyond Ethics. There is tremendous risk involved in declaring this moral program tied to *knowing*. One being, that the subject may be in error or has committed an act of BETRAYAL- specifically, the betrayal of one's self and the betrayal of the Moral Law that is inscribed in each of us. In this case, I declare that such delusions or betrayals are BAD, they are a MISTAKE, and not Evil, as they do not consciously oppose the moral law and do not hold this opposition as their maxim. In this case, the subject is in effect BELOW Good and Evil and lacks the spiritual guidance required in determining either.

The many proposals to legalize torture is an example of being below Good and Evil and shows the collapse of a productive ethical process when "the greater Good" is falsely tied to "National Security".

It may be that the *perversion* of ethics, and the time wasted on enjoying this perversion, is what ultimately bores me. The tiresome debate over whether in this "New post 9-11" world, should torture be allowed, regulated, sanctioned, encouraged... the parody the Geneva Convention has become not only in its original model to make war a gentleman's

game, but the obsolescence of its original ethic when it isn't quite working for US *today*. Here, ethics becomes a lengthy bureaucratic process of weighing fiscal or symbolic consequences that serve political ends and not social progress. Here, narcissism- or the placement of the greater good within the self-interest of a committee shows the weakening of a system that should always start with the self in direct relation to Others.

Is it possible that we are in praise of Evil? We who relish violent images, who hit the replay button to be shocked twice, we who search for death on the Internet to view over and over. These are the countless public confessions of our own wish for death that destroyed NYC well before the towers fell through the mastered craft of the illusionary apocalypse through popular media and cinema. The machine of spectacles never ceased to produce an endless supply for our hungry eyes. Our aesthetic prowess in simulating the birth of Empires and controlling the way in which it burns, for us, is total. The countless films that excited us in which NY or D.C. was torn asunder by "Aliens" leaving behind radioactive back yards. Or in the deserts of Mad Max, a romantic wish for the badlands of the Wild West, praising scar bearing heroes and the lawlessness of desert worlds. The wish for these deaths, the principle of *jouissance*, and the pathological desire for simulation, often sets us up to commit inevitable errors. We become delusional, and under this spell, we fall victim to our own innocent gaze into the Real- the gaze that Hegel found *itself* to be Evil.

This wish for death or apocalyptic dream where devils swarm the earth is bound to our fundamental curiosity for the exotic. What more exotic a place to go than Hell? What more exotic and strange a person to converse with than the villain? Evil is an exotic tobacco that many like to smoke. Some like to bring it back for others to share. If there is ever a shortage of this exoticism, we are masterful in growing it ourselves in the greenhouses of fantasy. The other theory I have to explain our desire to invoke devil's has more to do with the small pleasure we feel in making Mother scream- when she loses control. Things get exciting at that moment in the opera when the Diva can't take it anymore. That's the best part, that's when God makes an appearance.

In my appraisal of Evil as fantasy- as a public fantasy that is prescribed to the Other, I wanted to test this membrane of belief for its strength- I wanted to see if there could be a rupture. Who is our resident evil lunatic? And, what would he say about all this? Many answered, "Your guy is Charles Manson." What I wanted to discover in correspondence with Manson, was a tired old man who was uninteresting and uninterested- obsolete and harmless. And that was indeed what I found. However, the ghost of Charles Manson, the ghost that is out *here*, is surprisingly virile and never ceases to raise eyebrows at the mention of his name. Why is it that even in the midst of bloody wars, genocide, and mass organized rape, Charles Manson still holds such authority over our emotional reflex? Is it that he was home grown? Is it that Evil usually lives over *there* as archaic barbarism and over *here* in the First World it must be the Devil incarnate? I wanted to figure this out, take it apart, and wanted to know this road by having walked it. So, I invited him.

I wrote:

Charles Manson B-33920
4A4R-27L
PO BOX 3476
Corcoran, CA 93212-3476

Thursday March 3, 2005

To Charlie,

I am writing to you on a bus with some guilt loaded into my arm, my hand, the pen. You see, I haven't sent a letter to my own family in some time and for one reason or another- *your* ghost animates my arm more so than others at the moment. I attribute this to some sense of unusual urgency to correspond with you regarding some matters of importance.

As you have probably gathered by the letterhead I used- I am indeed writing to you from MIT. I'm working towards a Masters Degree in Visual Studies- in other words; I am an artist who found a niche in the institute that helped develop the atom bomb. So that's who I am officially- unofficially I am a writer, a farmer, a preacher, and surfer for which there is no appropriate letterhead.

I have organized a summit scheduled for April 3rd (in a month) to be held in a big lecture hall at MIT. I have invited several interesting people to speak of their personal philosophy regarding evil. I want to invite you to participate, come share your thoughts....yes I know your body is incarcerated but as we both know, the mind can travel great distances, your ghost will keep traveling long after all is said and done- we are but incarcerated in our bodies.

Charlie- let us hear the transcendent voice. Speak of evil. Or, perhaps more interestingly, speak of ABRAXAS....yes, ABRAXAS. ABRAXAS can lift your voice to us. My hope is that being locked up for so long hasn't weakened your interest in such things- or that being locked up hasn't made you crazy listening to your own thoughts all the time. I hope you can write me back right away with your feelings/thoughts about art and evil, technology and evil, messiah and ABRAXAS. If it is worth it to you, let me help your mind get out and take a little walk to

Cambridge Massachusetts. You can have a say in front of all these professors- I'll make a name tag for you- Let's make believe you can come to this summit- and sure enough- so long as we all believe, you'll make it here just fine, and we'll all hear you.

on another note

I know you are interested in politics (or were). What do you think of this Bush guy running the country and other worlds? In some ways, his mode of operation resembles Helter Skelter- a kind of constructive chaos- so I thought you might like the guy 'cause he's a productive force in the world. He runs around telling people everybody's evil. What do you make of him? Well, I know that he's killed a lot more people on his watch than you- and that's for damn sure! (killed a lot in Texas cause of the death penalty and all.)

Well, I don't want to bog you down with politics...but really---get back to me on things. The 60's are fucking OVER but you still have a mind, a ghost, and a message. These are new times in an ancient, crusty, and degenerate globe we call earth- so come out and tell me what you make of *today*. My friend Julian is an artist as well. He is a sculptor and likes interpreting things that have been destroyed, or the minds and machines that facilitate destruction. He has a question for you...here goes..."What are some of the most phenomenal acts of destruction in recorded history and could you expound upon a few?"

THE HORN

Lastly, if you are up at 8am on April 3rd a Sunday- hum a tune for us or toot this horn that I have enclosed for you to make. There will be horns like this in Baghdad, Cairo, the Vatican City, Jerusalem, and now- in Corcoran.

What did you make of those Afghans flying planes into the World Trade Center in NY? I thought to myself....somebody, somewhere, said the magic word.....

ABRACADABRA.

SLIDE of Manson's reply "You'll find Abraxas in the Hall" -Charles Manson

Manson knows this is happening, he was sent the plans to make a horn, and I trust he has played along with us. Yes, there is some sensationalism at play here by including him, but that is precisely what I wanted to investigate and ultimately debunk- his sensationalism. Speaking for myself, I wanted Manson to become real, to become banal, so that I could fully exorcize this popular ghost that distracts us from other larger concerns.

We will be speaking with Boyd Rice concerning his relationship with Manson later on- but first, let us begin with our first guest Julian LaVerdiere, who as an artist has investigated and experimented with the world's most questionable egos, their cataclysmic effect on the globe and through his particular artistic practice, gives us a different lens by which we can interpret a compelling aspect of science and social history.

He earned a BFA from The Cooper Union in New York and a MFA in sculpture from Yale University. In 1999, LaVerdiere had his first New York solo exhibition at Andrew Kreps Gallery. He has since had solo shows at No-Limits Gallery in Milan, Italy, Ever-Green Gallery in Geneva, Switzerland and the Lehman Maupin Gallery in New York, and has participated in numerous group exhibitions in the United States and Europe.

In 2001 and 2002, LaVerdiere worked with fellow-artist Paul Myoda, three architects, Creative Time and the Municipal Arts Society to create the *Tribute in Light*, the temporary light memorial to the victims of September 11th, 2001. This public artwork has subsequently been selected to become an annual addition to the WTC Memorial. Please welcome Julian LaVerdiere.

Transcription of Julian's contribution has not been included as it was primarily image driven with a heavy focus on his particular artistic practice in relation to the destruction of monuments. In a statement provided by Julian in the page that follows, the reader can find a reasonable summary of his presentation in very general terms.

DAMNATIO MEMORIAE: The Destruction of Memory

An art historical term for the intentional obliteration and destruction of monuments and important cultural icons laden with social-political meaning and historic significance. Many figurative sculptures and artifacts of ancient Greece and Rome show signs of intentional erasure and vandalism that were inflicted in times of cultural upheaval, thus sealing the fall of a regime by removing the image of its leader is a mode of rebellion so classic that there is a Latin name for it it- *Damnatio Memoriae*.

Acts of rebellious destruction have occurred regularly throughout history, some of my favorites are; the felling of the Vendome Column in Paris, by the Communards in 1871. The plundering of the Alexandrian Obelisk by the Masons in 1880. and the razing of Pennsylvania Station, by NYC officials in 1964, and the toppling of the World Trade Towers, in 2001 which is arguably more heinous than the others but if you remove death as a quantifier they are all evil and egregious crimes against History. I will explore these examples of Imperial symbolism, and juxtapose them with my own works: "Lost Corner Stone- Eagle", "Dung Beetle- Column Razer", "Imperial Dragster- Napoleons Tomb" and "Prime Mover- Obelisk carrier".

Much of my interests are also influenced by the sciences, which are often conceived to be with out morals and above and beyond the definitions of "Good and Evil", I will touch upon some of the mad-scientists who have inspired me with their destructive creations, Henry Gorringer (freemason & mechanical engineer who designed the apparatus to remove and transport Cleopatra's Needle in 1880), Werhner Von Braun (Nazi rocket scientist who designed the V2 in 1942) and the O.S.S. cartographers of the UN (who drafted the corrupt and biased emblem of the United Nations in 1947).

Without a doubt the destruction of the WTC is a text book example of "*Damnatio Memoriae*", an "evil" act of par excellence, I will speak about the Towers of Light as a response to it, and some of the symbolic associations this Light memorial has evoked.

EVIL'S POLITICAL HABITATS

JODI DEAN

In his 2002 State of the Union address, George W. Bush invoked an “axis of evil.” What available rhetorical fields enabled *the President* to link together North Korea, Iran, and Iraq and then judge the result as evil? What could hold this unstable train of signification together? Within what discursive registers was such a monstrous, bizarre moral geography *even comprehensible*?

“Evil” finds a hospitable environment in Bush’s presidential addresses because of the speculative identity of two seemingly opposed patterns of belief prominent in contemporary America—pervasive relativism and absolutist conviction. Through a retrospective on “evil” in presidential speeches, I show how this coincidence of opposites first inhabits the rhetoric of Ronald Reagan, arguably the figure Bush most seeks to emulate as president. At work in the words and personae of both the fortieth and the forty-third presidents is a powerful combination of conviction and vacuity such that resolve exists simply for its own sake. In Bush’s speeches this resolve culminates in a vision of himself and America as instruments of the will of God. “Evil” could inhabit the 2002 State of the Union address not simply because of Bush’s fluency in the language of the faith, but because of the coincidence of conviction and the broader culture of relativism in which the term “evil” floats so freely. “Evil” is powerful, efficacious, because its very lack of meaning (or the excesses of meaning over-determining it, which is the same thing) enables the term to produce a conviction-effect: no matter what “evil” means, people can be confident in Bush’s conviction—*he knows*. Hearing the 2002 State of the Union address, we believed that he was convinced there was an axis of evil.

Many Evils

At first glance, it might appear that “evil” could inhabit the 2002 State of the Union address because of the ready availability of a discourse of fear and terror following the events of September 11th, one, and of the prominence of religion in American life, two. Although “evil” no doubt flourishes in these discursive environments, to focus on either distracts attention from the pervasiveness of “evil” and the multiplicity of its modes of appearance.

September 11th has been said to have changed everything. It exposed the pernicious danger of postmodern relativism and the soul-destroying impact of irony. It proved decisively the reality of evil in the world. And, it has reconfigured reality by challenging us, the *civilized* (according to Bush and Samuel Huntington), to confront, wage war on, evil. These claims for September 11th are rooted in a discursive habitat formed by and nourished through the culture wars. They stem from the assumption that over the past forty years Americans have lost their moral sense, their capacity to speak seriously about evil. This loss is said to be significant, a truncating of the moral world insofar as the category “evil” is necessary for evaluating experiences, harms, sufferings, and dangers. This concern about the amputation of Americans’ moral sense, moreover, shares its discursive habitat with critical claims regarding the culture of irony, a fecund environment already in the post WWII era as the presumption of the general secularization of American society took hold.

That these claims for September 11th stem from the discursive environment of the culture wars is also attested to by a second assumption, namely, that relativists hate America. A number of conservative thinkers contend that the problem with liberals or postmodernists is not that they are relativists, but, on the contrary, that their apparent ethical pluralism is in fact ideological. Liberals and their ilk aren't really relativist at all. Rather, they believe that America itself is evil. For these conservatives, relativism, and its multicultural, ecumenical, and ethically pluralist kin, serves as the ideological guise of a treasonous anti-Americanism. These conservatives assume that "evil" remains part of a postmodern worldview, a worldview that is antithetical to American values and that September 11th revealed to be a threat to American unity and security.

The problem with the idea that September 11th provides the conditions of possibility for Bush's use of "evil" because "everything has changed" is that it is too vague and broad to account for the specificity of the rhetoric of evil. Why did the change in "everything" not reconfigure political language around the need for a global humanity or in terms of hope, care, or the triumph of the human spirit? That contemporary political rhetoric does not provide a hospitable environment for these terms seems fairly obvious—but why? A plausible account would need to attend at least to the discursive field of the culture wars, finding there the context delimiting "everything." But, even if there were a plausible link between September 11th and evil, this link could not extend by itself to North Korea, Iran, and Iraq. So how was the articulation of these three countries together with evil possible? What enabled this use of "evil"? An appeal to September 11th can't answer these questions.

The prominence of religion in American life suggests a readily available reservoir of terms of moral denunciation and outrage. Eighty percent or more Americans do not doubt the existence of God, pray daily, and believe in a final judgment. The religious right is clearly a powerful political force, one that has strengthened its hold and influence over the past thirty years. Yet, the ready availability of languages of faith and religious judgments conflicts with the notion that September 11th changed everything. The latter idea presupposes an underlying secularization or falling away from faith, a decline or loss of faith, not its prominence and ready availability as a language of moral condemnation.

More important, however, is the rich variation among and within American religious discourse. Religious language inhabits the political register in multiple, changing, and inconsistent ways. There is not a single or constant discourse of religion in American history: "evil" isn't and never has been "one thing" in American life. Eisenhower, for example, drew often upon a language of faith, beginning his first inaugural address with a prayer. Yet, his use of "evil" differs significantly from Bush's. Indeed, religious controversy and disagreement is far more prevalent in U.S. history and politics than anything like a unified Christian doctrine. There is even fragmentation and disagreement on the so-called religious right. One of the hardest hitting critiques of the "evil's of Fundamentalism" comes from John F. Baugh, a mainstream South Baptist who anchors his arguments firmly in the Bible.

That "evil" in the 2002 State of the Union address grew out of a language of faith, is uncontroversial. Former Bush speechwriter David Frum attests that "axis of hatred" in the original draft of the 2002 State of the Union was changed to "axis of evil" because it resonated better with the theological language Bush had been using since September 11th.

To call this theological language “religion,” however, is to solidify into unity a set of stories, tropes, ethics, and imaginaries that are already fluid and multiple. Bush’s own salvation experience, his *personal* religious walk, does not stand for “religion” in the singular. His relation to scripture and experience of conversion are not tied to mainstream denominational relation. Rather, they emerged out of a small-group program of focused reading and discussion called Community Bible Study. Moreover, the difference between Bush’s “faith walk” and his father’s Episcopalian upbringing enabled the younger Bush to serve as the liaison to the religious right for the 1988 presidential campaign. In the face of religious pluralism, the historical changes and variations within and between American religions, Bush’s religiosity cannot account for the “axis of evil.” Instead, we need to know more about the variety of ways in which religious invocations can be convincing in politics. How, in other words, are these invocations at home in a community larger than a specific community of faith?

Ultimately, the problems occasioned by focusing on September 11th and religion arise from a certain unicity of thought. Each account, in inverse ways, formats “evil” as a singularity as if “evil” were a master signifier capable of stopping shifts in signification. The idea that “everything has changed” obscures its rhetorical habitat, treating as a given the culture war’s contestations over morality and values. The idea that a pervasive American religiosity accounts for “evil,” likewise fails to attend to the varieties of religious practice and expression. In short, operating within each idea is a failure to attend to the ways that “evil” stimulates speech.

“Evil” is not at all uncommon. It’s all over the place. Evil is a major literary theme. A quick Google search turns up more than five million websites with “evil.” Many are satirical. Some involve faux mathematical equations proving that women are the root of all evil. Horror movies often explore the nature of evil, whether in the guise of say, Hannibal Lecter, or Austin Powers’ nemesis, Dr. Evil. In psychoanalytic terms, evil functions not at a master signifier or nodal point but as *objet petite a*, Jacques Lacan’s term for that fantastic/Real excess that attracts us and repels us, that we can desire but never reach, that we might flee but can never escape. The repressive hypothesis, then, doesn’t apply to evil.

So even as Bush may invoke “evil” as that ultimate threat which cannot be left unaddressed, this invocation does not unleash a repressed language of “evil.” That language is already there. “Evil” thrives in various habitats and registers. It adapts to differing practices, uses, and deployments. Journalists emphasize this multiplicity, seemingly stunned by the excesses of evil’s free-floating moments even as they ponder the instability of any and all attempts to explain or signify evil. In fact, this very multiplicity figures into invocations of evil as that which *must* be confronted as it comes to be embodied and summoned through extreme, unbearable images. Writing in *Time* magazine, Lance Morrow declares, “even if it’s elusive and even if the term is used brainlessly, evil is still there—a mystery, a black hole into which reason and sunshine vanish but nonetheless . . . there. Talk to the children with chopped off hands in Sierra Leone.” Armed with horrifying examples, one invokes “evil” as that which even the most deconstructive postmodernist cannot deny. One might say that in this way “evil” functions as a conservative logic of performative contradiction (by getting the relativist to deny that Hitler or slavery is evil, say, the conservative or absolutist thinks that he has

exposed a fundamental inconsistency that calls into question the place from which the relativist speaks) or a theological diagnosis of relativism's universal symptom (if one accepts that X—or denies that Y—is evil, then one has no way not to accept, ultimately, the extermination of masses of people, the obliteration of humanity, or the destruction of the world.) Detailed, embodied, sexualized bottom-line “evil” appears in David Frum's account of his role in constructing Bush's 2002 State of the Union address. Frum notes his reservations regarding what exactly to say about Saddam Hussein given that children might be watching the television speech with their parents: “Did we really want the president describing how Saddam murdered his enemies by burning them alive in acid baths? Or broke their nerve by forcing them to watch as his soldiers raped their daughters and wives? Or cut off the hands and ears or gouged out the eyes of soldiers he suspected of lack of courage?” To be sure, these same reservations did not restrain Bush's 2003 State of the Union address. In this address, Bush mentions tortured children whose parents are made to watch. And he concludes his list of methods used in the “torture chambers of Iraq”—electric shock, burning with hot irons, dripping acid on skin, mutilation with electric drills, cutting out tongues—that “if this is not evil, then evil has no meaning.”

Much more needs to be said about the details of “evil” and the role of these details in creating a habitat for the language of “evil” in political discourse than I can go into here. The matter is not, however, one of uncovering dogmatism. I say this because the generally interesting and thoughtful account of the modes and genres of political moralizing offered by Jane Bennett and Michael Shapiro overlooks the appeal of moral certainty in politics. For them, moralizing refers to “a style of speaking, writing, and thinking that is too confident about its judgments and thus too punitive in its orientation to others.” This overconfidence, they continue, “slips easily into dogmatism.” Deployments and incursions of “evil” in political language are resolutely, profoundly, deliberately dogmatic. When politicians like Bush use “evil,” they are saying that there are conditions and circumstances where dogmatism is necessary. Overconfidence and a punitive orientation are part of their appeal (an appeal marked by the excessive “too punitive”). For the dogmatic, dogmatism is a strength, a virtue. What is necessary, then, is a consideration of the contexts within which dogmatism is reassuring or even desirable.

Accordingly, I move now to a retrospective on “evil” in presidential speeches. These speeches point to an inverse relation between dogmatism and signification. The stronger the chain of significations articulated with evil, the less dogmatic is the use of the term. In reading these speeches, then, I attend to those moments when “evil” shifts from a statement about an object to a sign of the (dogmatic) conviction of a subject.

Presidential Evil

“Evil” has long been comfortable in presidential rhetoric, easily adapting to its changing demands. Taking up the Puritan political sermon or jeremiad, Sacvan Bercovich specifies the role of this rhetoric in producing “America” as a symbol. My account begins in the Depression and period directly prior to the Cold War. Briefly put, as president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt turns to “evil” as he leads the country out of the Depression. He links evil with capitalist excess and the poverty it engenders. His successor, Harry S. Truman takes on the association of evil with poverty even as he worries about the potential for

evil associated with technological development. At the same time, his language comes to express the polarities that will structure the Cold War. Evil, however, is not an element in this articulation. Thus, while evil's primary rhetorical host is economic distress, a secondary variant of "evil" also emerges at this time. This "evil" rides in on complexity and its challenge to power in a democracy.

Roosevelt's 1933 inaugural address is known primarily for its oft-repeated line, "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself." Not surprisingly, then, evil is nothing to fear. Government can address and manage evil. Performing this address and management, Roosevelt speaks of "evils" in the plural and expels these evils to the past. He observes that there are two safeguards against a return of the "evils of the old order:" strict supervision of all banking, credits, and investment and an end to speculation with other people's money. In Roosevelt's second and third inaugural addresses, "evil" inhabits the same rhetorical environment. Not only does Roosevelt continue to criticize those who "betray for profit the elementary decencies of life," he notes as well that Americans are no longer tolerant of abuses of power and heedless self-interest, "evil things formerly accepted" but now not so easily condoned. The third address announces that the country has survived its crisis and "put away evil things."

Even as "evil" is most comfortable in the register of past economic practices no longer threatening America, an evil variant appears in the second inaugural. Here, "evil" remains something to be managed through governance. Yet, now its temporality has changed. Rather than banished to the past, it is projected into a sort of indefinite future-present, the universal extra-temporality of moral engagement. Suggesting that the strength of democracy stems from the power lodged in the people, Roosevelt advises, "as intricacies of human relationships increase, so power to govern them also must increase, power to stop evil; power to do good."

In his first years as president, Truman reiterates Roosevelt's associations of evil with poverty. His 1948 State of the Union address refers to economic distress as a "disease whose evil effects spread far beyond the boundaries of the afflicted nation." The following year, in a general treatment of economic and social problems such as low minimum wage, growing monopolies, prejudice, and intolerance as opportunities for the Congress and the president to work together for the good of the people, he underscores that "Our first great opportunity is to protect our economy against the evils of boom and bust." In addition to linking evil to poverty, Truman also employs the evil variant that appeared in Roosevelt's second inaugural. That is to say, Truman, too, posits evil as something in the future, something to be resisted or overcome through the power of the people. Thus, in his 1950 State of the Union address, in the context of scientific, technological, and, presumably, military developments associated with "opening the secrets of nature," Truman announces, "Man must create the moral and legal framework for the world which will insure that his new powers are used for good and not evil. In shaping the outcome, the people of the United States will play a leading role." As with Roosevelt's speeches, then, so do Truman's provide a rhetorical habitat for evil: poverty, economic inequality, and the unchecked pursuit of profit are objects appropriately designated "evil;" at the same time, "evil" appears as the object of a project for the future, one associated with the moral strength of democratic governance.

Nevertheless, along with the political climate, the discursive environment of the late 1940s was changing. One site where the change can be detected is in a speech Truman gives before a joint session of Congress in 1947. In that speech, Truman requests economic assistance for Greece and Turkey (and elaborates what would become known as the Truman Doctrine.) He also uses the term “evil” and suggests a vision of the world as split between freedom and oppression. “Evil,” however, rather than explicitly tied to Soviet communism, remains articulated with poverty. More specifically, Truman asserts: “At the present moment in world history nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life. The choice is too often not a free one.” On one side is a way of life based on the will of the majority and “distinguished by free institutions, representative government, free elections, guarantees of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from political oppression.” On the other side is a way of life that “relies upon terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio, fixed elections, and the suppression of personal freedoms.” Despite this characterization of Soviet communism, Truman refrains from referring to either the regime or the ideology as “evil.” Instead, “evil” retains its link with economic deprivation: “The seeds of totalitarian regimes are nurtured by misery and want. They spread and grow in the evil soil of poverty and strife.” Evil flourishes in fetid zones of neediness, brutality, and despair. With this variation in the rhetorical environment established, Truman’s image of the conflict in Korea as an “evil war by proxy” in his 1951 State of the Union address is not surprising.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower drops from his rhetoric the social and economic sense of evil, embracing instead Truman’s opposition between freedom and slavery. Speaking within the symbolic frame of the Cold War, Eisenhower depicts this opposition in terms of a moral struggle between good and evil, although, like Truman, he refrains from calling the Soviet enemy itself “evil.” Additionally, even as Eisenhower adopts a more religious rhetoric than his that of his two immediate predecessors, the link they make between scientific and technological power and the challenge this power poses for future paths toward good or evil nevertheless continues to inhabit his speeches. I focus here on his first inaugural address (which establishes the rhetorical patterns he will follow thereafter; interestingly, he will not use the term “evil” in famous “military-industrial-complex” speech).

Before beginning his speech, Eisenhower asks his audience to bow their heads as he utters what he refers to as “a little private prayer of my own.” (That Eisenhower refers to a prayer said in a public office-taking ceremony as private, given that he speaks the prayer aloud and asks the audience to join him in bowing their heads, deeply challenges the notion of “private.” Still, the very fact that Eisenhower felt compelled to refer to his prayer as “private” suggests the continued presence of some sort of boundary or line between personal expressions of religious faith and public responsibility. In other words, were he to have no sense of the importance of a separation between church and state or faith and politics, Eisenhower would not have paid lip-service to the distinction between public and private acts.) He then testifies to the significance of the present moment in American history:

The world and we have passed the midpoint of a century of continuing challenge. We sense with all our faculties that forces of good and evil are massed and armed and opposed as rarely before in history.

This fact defines the meaning of this day. We are summoned by this honored and historic ceremony to witness more than the act of one citizen swearing his oath of service, in the presence of God. We are called as a people to give testimony in the sight of the world to our faith that the future shall belong to the free.

Having grown in strength and responsibility in the course of confronting wars and economic depression, the U.S. finds itself beseeching God's guidance and "groping to know the full sense and meaning of these times." Is the world heading toward darkness or nearing the light? This particular time of trial "comes at a moment when man's power to achieve good or to inflict evil surpasses the brightest hopes and the sharpest fears of all ages." Yet, the very hopes and promises mankind's achievements have enabled now imperil life itself. The proper response to science, the only response adequate to the threat of darkness and annihilation facing the world, is faith.

For Eisenhower, it is time for America to reaffirm and proclaim the faith of the free in man's deathless dignity as governed by eternal and natural law. "This faith defines our full view of life," Eisenhower declares. "It establishes, beyond debate, those gifts of the Creator that are man's inalienable rights, and that make all men equal in His sight." Enemies of this faith worship force and torture truth. America's destiny as the leader of the free world is thus to confront these enemies with confidence, conviction, moral strength, and, again, staunch faith. All Americans must be united as they renew their faith and devote themselves to the nation's fundamental precepts: "No person, no home, no community can be beyond the reach of this call. We are summoned to act in wisdom and in conscience, to work with industry, to teach with persuasion, to preach with conviction, to weigh our every deed with care and with compassion. For this truth must be clear before us: whatever America hopes to bring to pass in the world must first come to pass in the heart of America." In sum, "evil" serves in Eisenhower's rhetoric to mark the moral precipice on which America, and the world, find themselves. What Roosevelt and Truman projected into the future as the possible object of a collective project confronts America as a problem now, in the present. "Evil" is that in opposition to which America can know and realize who it is.

John F. Kennedy's inaugural address ("ask not what your country can do for you...") adopts a tone decidedly different from Eisenhower's. Rather than emphasizing a fundamental division in the world, Kennedy, appeals to hopes for peace, to civility, to arms control, to scientific wonder (rather than terror) and to shared struggle against common problems of disease, poverty, and war. Kennedy's language is also far less religious (likely because religious language from Kennedy would suggest his Catholicism and could occasion anxiety about Papal influence). These changes have not created a discursive environment completely inhospitable to evil—but close. In two speeches given in June of 1963, Kennedy refers to the communism as an evil system. He nevertheless qualifies these remarks, noting that "no government or social system is so evil that its people must be considered as lacking in virtue" and bracketing the attribution of "evil" as

words of “a few who say.” Such qualification may have enabled the mutated “evil” that appears in his address on the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. In this speech, evil is linked neither to America’s moral destiny nor to economic and social ills. Rather, it appears as an object in non-American eyes, that is, as how others may see America. The President notes:

These tests befoul the air of all men and all nations, the committed and the uncommitted alike, without their knowledge and without their consent. That is why the continuation of atmospheric testing causes so many countries to regard all nuclear powers as equally evil; and we can hope that its prevention will enable all those countries to see the world more clearly, while enabling all the world to breathe more easily.

Kennedy’s language suggests that if America looks at itself from the perspective of nonaligned nations, it might well recognize a more complex moral world than the one governing its prior assumptions of right. Lyndon B. Johnson retains this more complex vision, suggesting as well that it is not one conducive to the language of “evil.” Thus, in his “Let Us Continue” speech given after Kennedy’s assassination, Johnson doesn’t declare war on evil or unite Americans in steadfast dedication to its eradication. Rather, he says that the challenge is *not* to linger over this “evil moment,” but to move forward. To this end, Johnson urges Congress to increase taxes and enact a civil rights bill. He concludes: “The time has come for Americans of all races and creeds and political beliefs to understand and respect each other. So let us put an end to the teaching and the preaching of hate and evil and violence. Let us turn away from the fanatics of the far left and the far right, from the apostles of bitterness and bigotry . . .” Finding “evil’s” proper home to be in the extreme speech of fanatics, Johnson attempts to weed it out of political speech.

Yet, he can’t eliminate it entirely. “Evil” sometimes appears in its older form as a social and economic evil, as lack and deprivation. “Evil” also sprouts up in Johnson’s 1967 State of the Union address, albeit sheltered within a quote from Thomas Jefferson: “It is the melancholy law of human societies to be compelled sometimes to choose a great evil in order to ward off a great evil.” Johnson invokes these words to justify the choice to fight a limited war in Vietnam.

Perhaps because evil had become, at least in this specific rhetoric, something America chose, that is, an acknowledged although dreaded attribute of American actions, it only rarely finds itself in the words of the three presidents who follow Johnson. For the most part, these presidents actively and consciously employ a political language designed to lessen political tensions. I include here a few examples. Nixon, in his first inaugural address, reiterates Johnson’s attempt to produce a moderate political language even as he distances himself from Johnson’s war. Drawing from a Quaker language of simplicity, quietude, and responsive listening, Nixon suggests that answers to America’s problems might be if Americans look within themselves for “the simple things, the basic things” such as “goodness, decency, love and kindness.” If Americans are to listen to each other, moreover, they will have to learn to stop shouting. Nixon notes that “America has suffered from a fever of words; from inflated rhetoric that promises more than it can deliver; from angry rhetoric that fans discontents into hatreds; from bombastic rhetoric

that postures instead of persuading.” As “we,” the American people, learn to speak quietly, government, also identified as “we,” will listen: “We will strive to listen in new ways—to the voices of quiet anguish, the voices that speak without words, the voices of the heart—to the injured voices, the anxious voices, the voices that have despaired of being heard.” In this environment, “evil” has no place.

Gerald Ford also expresses exhaustion with evil, a sense that words like “evil” should not inhabit political discussion. “Evil” is too extreme and dangerous a term for politics. But, even as Ford wants the term eliminated, it undergoes an additional mutation in his rhetoric: “evil” is how “others” refer to America. In his January 19, 1976 State of the Union Address, Ford complains that Americans have for too long “downgraded” themselves as a nation. “The American people have heard too much about how terrible our mistakes, how evil our deeds, and how misguided our purposes. The American people know better. The truth is we are the world's greatest democracy.” In his official speeches as President, Carter doesn’t use “evil” at all, emphasizing instead the more inclusive ideal of human rights.

Ronald Reagan’s speeches employ a radically different rhetoric from those of his immediate predecessors. On the one hand, the stark divisions of his Cold Warrior stance create, as did Eisenhower’s, a fertile environment for the oppositions of good and evil, free and totalitarian, us and them. On the other hand, evil’s political habitat in Reagan’s speeches is so rich that the term rapidly reproduces and spreads far beyond the initial binary of American and Soviet. Among those items Reagan identifies as “evil” are dim economic prospects, inflation, stagflation, terrorism, deaths of American soldiers in El Salvador, international drug-trafficking, “more and more government intervention,” segregation, discrimination based on race, religion, and sex, racism, anti-Semitism, ethnic and religious intolerance, Hitler, and the Holocaust. Thus, in Reagan’s speeches, myriad issues are matters of moral struggle. Indeed, this condition of struggle is, for Reagan, ontological: the world itself consists of great good and great evil. Such an establishing of evil as a fact of existence changes the character of the moral judgment. Under conditions of ontological evil, failing to recognize evil becomes moral weakness while naming it becomes the key signifier of moral strength, courage, and will. Differently put, Reagan’s language blends two approaches to evil, a moral and an ontological, and such a blending transforms political struggles between winners and losers into moral struggles between saints and sinners or, worse, the forces of God and the forces of Satan.

Ontological evil provides the context for Reagan’s “evil empire” speech and one he made in 1992 at the Oxford Union. This latter address, moreover, exemplifies most strongly the discursive environment of evil today.” I turn first to the “evil empire” speech. Reagan delivered it before the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida on March 8, 1983. The first half of the speech emphasizes policies dear to the Christian right: restrictions on abortion and a constitutional amendment to restore prayer to public schools. Although this part of the speech appeals to religious tenets with a long history in American political rhetoric (with cites to William Penn, Thomas Jefferson, and George Washington), it is not itself expressed in the language of religious conviction. That mode of expression appears in the second half of the speech. As he concludes his discussion of every child’s right to life, Reagan observes “a great spiritual awakening in America.” Shortly thereafter, he repeats, “America is in the midst of a spiritual

awakening.” He then repeats the biblical keynote of the evangelical association’s meeting, “yes, let justice roll on like a river.” As I see it, these repetitions serve as a transition into a more religious mode of speech, into a language of faith. And, indeed, as Reagan moves to the last two issues of his speech, he turns to philosophy and theology to ground his claims about ontological evil: “...we must never forget that no government schemes are going to perfect man. We know that living in this world means dealing with what philosophers would call the phenomenology of evil or, as theologians would put it, the doctrine of sin. There is sin and evil in the world, and we’re enjoined by Scripture and the Lord Jesus to oppose it with all our might.” The world is a moral battlefield, the site of the epochal struggle between good and evil, right and wrong, and God commands his people, not to turn the other way or shield themselves from evil, not to appease or accommodate their adversaries, but to struggle, with all their might, against evil in this world.

The last two issues in Reagan’s speech are dramatized within this fundamental struggle that faces humanity as a whole. The first enacts the purification of the soul or the setting in order of one’s house that prepares the chosen for spiritual warfare. Reagan tells the evangelicals that America, too, has “a legacy of evil with which it must deal.” This legacy involves racism, anti-Semitism, bigotry, and prejudice. Reagan enjoins his audience to transcend these evils: “Use the mighty voice of your pulpits and the powerful standing of your churches to denounce and isolate these hate groups in our midst. The commandment given us is clear and simple: ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.’” Cleansed of past sins and girded in moral rectitude, America will have the strength for the ultimate battle, a spiritual battle, against the “aggressive impulses of an evil empire.”

The stake are high—people’s very souls. After he urges his audience to stand with him in opposing “the so-called nuclear freeze solutions proposed by some,” Reagan shifts, dramatically, to the story of a young father, a father who loves his two little girls so much that he would rather see his “little girls die now, still believing in God, than have them grow up under communism and one day die no longer believing in God.” The fight against the Soviets is a fight for salvation, eternal life. And so Reagan declares: “Yes, let us pray for the salvation of all of those who live in totalitarian darkness—pray that they will discover the joy of knowing God. But until they do, let us be aware that while they preach the supremacy of the state, declare its omnipotence over individual man, and predict its eventual domination of all peoples on the earth, they are the focus of evil in the modern world.” Like the serpent in the garden, an image Reagan also invokes, Marxism-Leninism tempts humanity with false promises of power and omnipotence. But, these are not promises any government can keep: true strength is spiritual. Likewise, America, although it needs strong defense, cannot rely simply on bombs and rockets: “The real crisis we face today is a spiritual one; at root, it is a test of moral will and faith.”

Evil is alive in Reagan’s speech. It is a powerful force that permeates the world in which Americans find themselves and that establishes the very conditions that give meaning to their lives. These conditions are uncertain and opaque: insofar as there are so many evils—totalitarianism and intolerance, intrusive government and sexual and racial discrimination—it becomes difficult to see what, precisely, the attribution “evil” is

signifying. More bluntly put, how can evil invoke a Christian God, claim that the Soviets are evil because they do not believe in God, *and* urge tolerance? Reagan's emphasis on tolerance thus introduces an uncertainty into what, exactly, is evil—indeed, the American legacy of evil he invokes is rife with division on precisely this point. Is what was once understood as the evil of miscegenation, for example, now to be recognized as an instance of the evil of discrimination? And what about the right to abortion? Why is that not important in ending sex discrimination, another evil that Reagan urges his evangelical audience to address? Yet the ambiguity here is important for it opens up a space for moral will, for decisiveness and action, for living struggle. For Reagan, evil is clear. He knows what it is. By naming evil, then, Reagan places himself within a prophetic tradition dear to evangelicals and rooted in American history. He places himself, that is to say, in the position of someone with an ontological knowledge of the truth and with the moral courage to speak the truth. Evil's ambiguity enables the importance of the term to shift to the one willing to invoke it.

In a later interview, Reagan emphasizes that the importance of “evil” in the speech was no so much that it characterized the Soviets, though it did, but that it expressed a willingness to acknowledge real differences between the US and the USSR. Thus, in response to the interviewers' observation that the speech made it seem like reconciliation between the two powers would be impossible given that what was at stake was a confrontation between good and evil, light and dark, Reagan responds:

I think it is somehow lifting that out of context—of this line and this description as the focus of evil and so forth. Certainly their entire beliefs, beginning with the disbelief in God—their beliefs are so contrary to what we accept as morality. Witness a Kampuchea and an Afghanistan and so forth. But no, what I was pointing out there, and I still believe is time-tested and proven, is not the inevitability of war, but a recognition and a willingness to face up to what these differences are in our views and between us, to be realistic about it.

Realism, for Reagan, involves the recognition of the evil in the world, the willingness to accept that the world is not a perfect place and never will be. Reagan knows what the world is like and he is strong enough in his convictions to face this world without blinking or blinders. This conviction, this willingness to acknowledge and name evil in the world, is not limited to the discursive environment of the Cold War. Rather, the end of the Cold War releases the terminology of evil from the already weak constraints of the confrontation between the US and USSR. This spreading, flourishing evil, and the willingness to name it, is the second aspect of Reagan's speeches that continues to flourish today in the rhetoric of George W. Bush. It appears most strongly in a speech Reagan gave in England after he was president and after the end of the Cold War.

On December 4, 1994, Reagan delivered the address, “Democracy's Next Battle,” at the Oxford Union Society. Noting that the fight against totalitarianism “was a grand and noble cause, one that united the entire civilized world,” Reagan finds that its end has

“robbed much of the west of its uplifting, common purpose.” “Will we turn inward, lulled by a dangerous complacency and the short-sighted view that the end of one Evil Empire means the permanent banishment of evil in all its forms?” he asks. To answer, and in answering restore a sense of mission to the “civilized world,” Reagan returns to ontological evil: “Evil still stalks the planet.” Although this evil is not identical to the evil of Marxism-Leninism, although it is not systematic, coherent, or localized, it continues, inevitably to permeate the world. As Reagan declares, “Its ideology may be nothing more than bloodlust; no program more complex than economic plunder or military aggrandizement. But it is evil all the same. And wherever there are forces in the world that would destroy the human spirit and diminish human potential, they must be recognized and they must be countered.” The mission Reagan envisions is for “civilized nations” to stand “in unison” against “immoral and deadly excesses” around the globe such as those undertaken by Saddam Hussein and in places like Bosnia, Somalia, and Sudan. Fighting these evils will require imposing “civilized standards” of international conduct and enforcing those standards with a fully equipped U.N. force—“an army of conscience.” Thus, Reagan challenges his Oxford audience to contribute to the “age-old battle for individual freedom and human dignity.” The next generations, like the ones before them, have a cause and service to this cause will provide their lives with meaning. They should not forget those who suffer violence and neglect. As Reagan enjoins, “Do not abandon them to the evils of totalitarian rule or democratic neglect.” In this late speech, then, democratic neglect, failure to name and act, is itself an evil, one that Reagan is continuing to fight.

Since his presidency ended, Republicans and conservatives have continued to praise Reagan for his resolve. Crediting him with bringing down the Soviet Union and, echoing his 1984 campaign theme, with bringing morning to America after the “malaise” of the Carter years, those on America’s political right celebrate Reagan for the realism and moral strength of his political message. But, what exactly does realism mean here? The obvious answer, that “realism” refers to the emphasis on security characteristic of the realist school of international relations, fails to explain why, exactly, a bifurcated worldview and distain for arms control are realistic responses to a nuclear standoff. More importantly, this answer fails to account for the context of Reagan’s invocations of evil in his ontology. For Reagan, evil is Real—it flows throughout the world, threatening and subverting the civilized order. Precisely because of its pervasive, excessive, nature, this evil can be slippery, deceptive. Recognizing it, naming it, thus requires will—the will to break with conventional wisdom, stop paying lip service to the order of appearances, reject established political norms (this rejection of norms is of course a key feature of realist international relations). Indeed, the necessity of the strength of will is all important given the loss, violation, or denial of the symbolic order: naming evil demands a response, a willingness to “do what is necessary,” to engage in acts and practices that, from the perspective of the symbolic, may seem themselves to be evil.

One of the insights of psychoanalysis is that the decline of the symbolic leads to a powerful alliance of the imaginary with the Real. Such an alliance is clearly at work with Reagan for, accompanying his ontological evil, were fantasy images of Reagan as a

cowboy and explicit acknowledgements of his work as an actor. The realism of Reagan's political will, in other words, was always supported by fantasies of figures of strength. Reagan could play these roles and, indeed, gestured to them by repeating lines from his movies, "take one for the Gipper."

American presidents have long drawn from religious language. Twentieth century presidents have, like those who came before them, used the term "evil." But the term means different things in different contexts—and sometimes it doesn't mean anything at all; sometimes, that is, it signifies the will of the one who speaks it, not the object to which it refers. The discursive environment provided by Reagan's speeches differs significantly from that of his immediate predecessors—Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, and Carter. Superficially, it resembles Eisenhower's, but this resemblance to Eisenhower's is misleading. Not only does Eisenhower refer to his inaugural prayer as "private" and refrain from attempting to convert the Soviets from their atheism, but he also treats the forces of good and evil as elements of the symbolic order of the Cold War: freedom is good and totalitarian slavery is evil. Eisenhower invokes a symbolically consistent moral world, one where the ambiguities and tensions always subverting attributions of good and evil are repressed, contained. In that moment of history when the world faces a choice a choice between good and evil, America must not give way on its faith in human freedom and dignity. These inalienable rights are gifts of the Creator; the struggle to secure them takes place in the presence of the Creator, and America turns to the Creator for guidance in these times. But, Eisenhower does not say that he or America is an instrument of the Creator. He does not say that God has instructed the US to fight His battle against the forces of the evil. In short, Eisenhower's language works within the symbolic order of the Cold War as it presents Americans as subjects with choices and responsibilities. Reagan depicts evil as Real and says that God commands us to fight against it. The difference between Reagan's language and that of Truman and Roosevelt is also misleading. Like them, he links evil to technological complexity, diminished human potential, and that which is to be fought through the moral strength of democratic governance. Yet, what is most striking is what happens to governance in the face of Reagan's ontologization of evil: a radical fusion of previously separate fields and practices. Recall, Reagan finds evil in dim economic prospects, deaths of American soldiers in El Salvador, terrorism, drug-trafficking, "excessive" government intervention, intolerance, segregation, discrimination, racism, and anti-Semitism. In the Oxford Union speech, moreover, he urges that wherever they arise all such forces must be recognized and countered. He envisions a U.N. backed "army of conscience." Ontological evil thus overflows already unstable distinctions between war and policing, religion and politics, justice and administration. In the face of the Real of evil, these divisions—and a disciplining, actuarial approach to risk—fall apart. Rather than operating within a political space, ontological evil, as I argue in the next section, participates in its foreclosure or elimination.

George W. Bush and Ontological Evil

Just as Reagan prayed for the salvation of those living in totalitarian darkness, so does George W. Bush find religion the best response to political troubles. As Howard

Fineman observes, “the Bush administration is dedicated to the idea that there is an answer to societal problems here and to terrorism abroad: give everyone, everywhere, the freedom to find God, too.” And, just as Reagan envisions in his Oxford Union address, so does Bush see the world today as a religious war of good versus evil expressed through the racial logic of the civilized versus the barbarians. To draw out these parallels, I emphasize Bush’s combination of vacuity and conviction. Not only does “evil” inhabit Bush’s speeches as an ontological given and thus highlight his resolve in naming it, but it works further to designate the subject confronting evil as an object or instrument of God. Because conviction comes from God, the one who names evil serves as an extension or embodiment of God’s will. I am tempted to make the point even more strongly—the *only way Bush can guarantee that he is chosen by God is by demonstrating the power God gives him to name and confront evil* without wavering, with complete and utter conviction (in the face of criticism, competing facts, alternative views, etc). For the responsible will of fallible and uncertain political subjects, then, ontological evil substitutes confrontations between objects in accordance with the inevitabilities of the will of God. Put more psychoanalytically, Bush’s embrace of ontological evil entails a shift from the hysterical subject of democracy, the subject who keeps asking questions and challenging authority, to the perverse, post-political subject—the pervert has no doubts; he “brings to light, stages, practices the secret fantasies that sustain the dominant public discourse.” The pervert knows what is required and makes himself into that instrument that does what is required.

Accounts of the 2000 presidential campaign emphasize the emptiness, if not downright stupidity, of George W. Bush. Bush exhibited little interest in policy specifics and little knowledge of political issues. Polls taken during the primaries, says Frank Bruni, the *New York Times* reporter assigned to the Bush campaign and White House, “showed that support for Bush was less firmly grounded in anything real than support for some other candidate was.” Respondents found it difficult to give specific reasons for their support for Bush. Yet Bush’s vagueness was useful. Bush was a candidate “whose very lack of bold definition—whose spongy failure to make an emphatic mark—allowed him to assume the attributes of the scenery around him. It enabled him to be whatever people were inclined or wanted to see, a Rorschach running for president.” A key element of the Republican campaign was thus to rely on images and effects that would affect voters viscerally. The Bush campaign demonstrated, Bruni writes, “how much could be fixed with powder and puffery, how thoroughly a candidate could be transformed from the outside in, how little he had to do but stand on the right set, under the right lighting, and say the right lines. If it was hard to figure out exactly what Bush was made of—and if, by September 11, 2001, it was not a whole lot easier—this was a good part of the reason.”

Bush’s vagueness persisted into the early months of his presidency. Again, he demonstrated little patience with the details of governance or the complexities of public policy. His few public statements were vapid soundbites; anything more he tended to bungle with the sort of malapropisms one associates with young children. As his former speechwriter David Frum emphasizes, “Bush’s political vision was unclear.” Bush had

political instincts and general beliefs, but, in the first half of 2001, it was nearly impossible to tell what, if any, ideas Bush actually had. Bush's vacuity was coupled with conviction. His personal faith, the salvation experience that led him to quite drinking and get serious about his life, was his most distinct feature. Voters may not have not exactly what compassionate conservatism entailed, but they did know that Bush was a man of convictions, that he was decisive and relied on his gut instincts. The fact of this conviction has dominated Bush's speeches and the message his administration has sought to impart since September 11th. The terms "evil" and "evil-doers" frequent his rhetoric, as do deeper and more significant religious allusions.

Yet, the confused and scattered initial reactions of the Bush administration to the September 11th attacks should not be forgotten. Speaking in an elementary school in Florida when the planes hit the twin towers, Bush didn't return to Washington for over nine hours, flying instead to air bases in Louisiana and Nebraska. To many, his initial speeches seemed ill-suited to the magnitude of the moment. Early polls suggested that barely half the country were "highly confident" in Bush's ability to handle the crisis. The White House staff worked to control the situation by repeating, at every possible moment, that the president was "focused" and "resolute." According to Bruni, "the efficacy of even such transparent tactics soon became clear. By using this vocabulary over and over, aides lodged it so deeply in the minds of reporters that these reporters began adopting it without even realizing it. On the morning after Bush's address to Congress, stories in both the *Washington Post* and the *Times* that analyzed his demeanor used the word 'resolute,' without quotation marks, in the first paragraphs."

Not surprisingly, the term "resolute" and its kin, "resolve" and "resolution" feature prominently in Bush's September 20, 2001 address to Congress. They characterize what Bush asks of the American people as they enter into "civilization's war," a war that divides the world into those who stand with America and those who stand with America's murderous enemies. They also characterize Bush's own rhetoric: he is certain. He knows—the rightness of the war, even the end of the war. As he testifies, "The course of this conflict is not known, yet its outcome is certain. Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them." Bush doesn't know the course of the war, but that sort of detail doesn't matter. What matters is Bush's certainty that God is on America's side and that God's side always wins. After the September 20th speech, confidence in Bush jumped to eighty-six percent (an extraordinary number for an American president) and remained over eighty during the next several months.

Such confidence in Bush results from the combination of vacuity and resolve. What mattered was less the content of speech than the fact that he demonstrated resolve, strength, and command. On the one hand, this is not surprising: as was often repeated in the media during those days, America was looking for leadership. One might also express this idea in psychoanalytic terms: many Americans were looking for someone through whom they could enact revenge for the attacks. On the other hand, there is something surprising in the emptiness of Bush's expectations for Americans—they were

to show resolve, too, but in what? In going about their everyday lives, returning to business, loving their families, hugging their children, and shopping. Bush gave Americans permission to do what they wanted to do; doing what they wanted was now their patriotic duty!

Additionally, one should note the splitting that media emphasis on Bush as presidential effects: insofar as the news media in the first months following the September 11th attacks emphasized (incorporating language given them by the White House) how *presidential* Bush was they inadvertently voiced an anxiety that he was not quite presidential or that there was at least a risk of him not being presidential enough. *Shouldn't resolve be demonstrated by more than going back to our everyday activities? Shouldn't someone be made to suffer? To die?* Differently put, attention to the appropriateness of his resolve or demeanor underscores the gap between the man and his office. As the war on terror continued, this gap was covered over by the fantasy of a second, evil, more powerful, leader, one perhaps less constrained by goodness or compassion, one willing to exact the necessary, awful revenge—Vice President Dick Cheney at work in his secret underground bunker, heading the shadow government.

Slavoj Žižek's account of the two figures of the Master helps explain the importance of this doubling of authority. The invisible Master, Žižek writes, "is a kind of uncanny double of public authority: he has to act in shadow, invisible to the public eye, irradiating a phantomlike, spectral omnipotence." If Bush was the visible voice of justice, resolute, but vague nevertheless, then fantasies of Cheney provided the obscene supplement underpinning this resolve. After September 11th, Bush relied on "evil" to work as a nodal point holding together the discourse that would establish the meaning of the war on terror. Bush and Cheney were two sides of the Master installing this meaning. Bush could give people what they wanted and the very vagueness of what he was giving could be covered over by the fantasy of the repulsive Cheney at work behind the scenes, a fantasy of people really getting what they wanted. Cheney provided the fantasy of secret power, of actions so unbecoming to the president, to America, that they best not see the light of day.

The war on terror is the appropriate background for Bush's axis-of-evil speech not because Saddam Hussein had any connection with September 11th but because Bush's ontological evil fuses all violence, crimes, threats, and the *potential or possibility* of any violence, crime, or threat into the theater of absolute struggle. As he said in his September 20, 2001 address, anyone not on the side of America was on the side of the terrorists, that is, on the side of evil. Recognizing the importance of this ontological evil makes clear why the facts and details and justifications for war against Iraq had so little to do with the actual invasion. Bush knows—he doesn't need to be bogged down by policies and inspections. Bush is certain—he doesn't need the support or consent of other nations. His certainty comes from God. Precisely because Bush doesn't think so much as feel and pray and rely on his gut, he can know and be certain. Naming evil enacts this certainty. The war against Iraq made sense because it was part of the struggle against evil. The imaginary axis of evil says nothing about Iraq, North Korea, and Iran. It says something about Bush. Secretary of State Colin Powell said as much as he defended the

speech by emphasizing “the president’s very powerful and clear and honest statement.” The statement is powerful, clear, and honest—the president spoke from his heart. The actual facts are not the issue. Bush’s conviction empowers him to see among the excesses of evil flowing throughout the world that evil that must be directly confronted and named: he can do more than fight a vague war on terrorism; he can locate in the present those evils that might threaten us in the future. “Evil” thus designates that “special something” (*objet petite a*), that extra beyond brutal, repressive, very bad, that Bush takes as his call to eliminate. (And, conveniently, considering evil as *objet petite a* highlights the way that it will never be eradicated; instead, it is an aspect of the drive to eradicate as such. Bush’s notorious May 2003 landing of a small Viking jet onto the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier to announce the victory of US forces in Iraq is a good example here. What criticism of this publicity stunt misses is the way that the warrior images enacted not Bush’s fantasy of US militarism but the reality of US militarism—the staged fantasy didn’t cover up the truth of ongoing military conflict. On the contrary, it performed it and in so doing expressed the truth of Bush’s intentions to continue in his fight to eliminate evil from the world.

One last aspect of the way “evil” inhabits Bush’s language is crucial to understanding how Bush could invoke an axis of evil. This last aspect, moreover, points less toward Bush’s serving as some kind of a Master who knows than it does to Bush’s functioning perversely as a kind of object or instrument. Bush sees himself as chosen by God. He sees America as duty bound to ensure the establishment of God-given rights all over the world. To this extent, fighting evil is a false choice: we have no choice; or, the only response to this choice is to accept it, *bring it on!*—anything else is damned from the outset. The falseness of this choice is clear when we try to introduce it into the field of politics and debate it: *okay, we can end world poverty, find a cure for cancer, or eradicate evil in the world*—whoever “votes” against eradicating evil must secretly support it! Perhaps the proper response to Bush’s ontological evil is to take the choice of fighting evil seriously—yes, there is evil in the world, but there are other challenges as well.

Nevertheless, once the US is God’s chosen instrument for removing evil from the world, we have lost even the illusion—itsself a vital source of utopian energies—of democracy and the rule of law. Invoking evil as Real ruptures the symbolic order of language, rules, and norms—Bush can barely speak; his administration uses language as a mantra, meme, or slogan to affect people directly and viscerally; and, his invasion of Iraq broke explicitly with previous US foreign policy, the norms of the international community. How far this has gone might be seen in the attacks on Howard Dean, the Vermont governor who sought the Democratic nomination for president. Dean has been widely mocked for suggesting that Osama bin Laden should receive a fair trial. The rule of law, it seems, is now a joke, a joke preventing the US from eradicating evil from the world.

Conclusion

While “evil” has long flourished in the fecund discursive habitats of Americanized religiosity, it has inhabited political speech as well, evolving as it adapts to

changes in political climate. “Evil” is at home in George W. Bush’s presidential rhetoric not because of his own personal faith, but because of a larger coincidence of relativism and absolutist conviction, of the instability of signification and the resolve to signify in the face of this instability. Rather than two warring ethical or epistemological attitudes, relativism and absolutist conviction are two sides of the same coin, part of the same ideological matrix. On the one hand, this coincidence of opposites involves the way that each position limits and conditions the other—relativists understand their position against absolutists and vice versa. To this extent, neither position is fully identical with itself; each is internally split, possible only through the other. But more important is the way that the speculative identity between relativism and absolutism can be expressed as internal to relativism: relativism denotes an attitude toward absolutes. Far from negating or even taking issue with these absolutes, relativism requires the acceptance of particularized convictions, the acknowledgement that each is entitled to her own beliefs and opinions. Differing positions or beliefs are not to be engaged, compared, analyzed or brought into critical dialogue with one another. Rather, they are to be accepted as wholes, as essences, unique to the self-identity of another. Today, then, absolute conviction appears in and through relativism. Relativism encourages certainty in one’s own convictions *precisely because* it accepts that others have their own convictions: *my convictions make me who I am*.

Given the rich variability in “evil’s” discursive habitats, the multiple registers in which it thrives, determining the fields of reference informing a specific invocation of “evil” is difficult, potentially unending. Much easier is the registration of affect: an invocation of “evil” expresses an intensity of judgment and belief. The efficacy or weight of the term “evil” thus shifts from the signified to the signifying subject. The subject is convinced, certain; he knows the truth; he feels it deep in his soul. Moreover, as hearers join the speaker in filling in “evil” with content, they become invested in the struggle against “evil:” insofar as they have suppressed uncertainties and installed their own unacknowledged fantasy of evil into the empty place the term occupies they identify all the more deeply, libidinally, with the battle against it. “Evil” might thus be usefully analogized to “obscenity” in first amendment jurisprudence: giving a clear, principled, definition of obscenity is too difficult; nevertheless, “we know it when we see it. The emphasis shifts from the object to those who know, to those brave and forthright enough to look evil in the face. Were the terms “obscenity” and “evil” clear and unambiguous, using them, applying them to their proper objects, would be no great feat. In the U.S. of George W. Bush, as in the U.S. of Ronald Reagan, this shift of the efficacy of the term “evil” from its object to the signifying subject suggests will, courage, and faith; indeed, it points to the resolve and conviction of a subject who knows.

As the genealogy of “evil” in presidential speeches attests, Reagan’s invocation of evil differs markedly from that of his predecessors as evil becomes an ontological fact. Ontological evil permeates the world, establishing the conditions of existence even as its specificity as an attribute or judgment remains elusive. This elusiveness, in turn, reflects on the moral character of the one willing to confront the truth of evil. Likewise, Bush’s invocation of an “axis-of-evil” doesn’t say anything about Iran, North Korea, or Iraq. It doesn’t even say something about September 11th. Rather, it says something about Bush—that he is a man of conviction, that he is certain, that he knows. Armed with certainty, he is empowered to fight evil in all its myriad, shifting, evolving forms, fighting it as possibility, as potential, fighting it before its pernicious effects can even be felt. In the face of Bush’s knowledge of ontological evil, reasons are at best signs of weakness, of a lapse in certainty. At worst, they are hosts for pernicious evil a mutant form in which evil hides.

LET'S GO
AHEAD,
LET'S
MISBEHAVE

RONALD JONES

EVIL

c. RONALD JONES

In 1945, the year Robert Oppenheimer detonated the first atomic bomb at Trinity, Pablo Picasso sculpted *Death's Head*. Both ingenious men lent credence to Clement Greenberg's perception that modernism's grand ambition was to know creativity as had God; that is, without originals. In this sense the work of artist and scientist were expressions of individual volition; Picasso and Oppenheimer used their free will as the instrument for creating something radical and original. But a fundamental difference exists in the nature of the free will expressed by each man, as one did modern science, the other modern art. It is a difference that defines each discipline at a genetic level. It is a difference between grasping free will as proceeding from deep-seated moral choices, or understanding it as un-tethered to ethics.

Navigating by his free will, Oppenheimer traveled from the contemplation of spitting an atom to dropping the bomb over Hiroshima which required a moral decision. Radical evil was at hand in the New Mexico desert, and it was there that Oppenheimer assumed the role of a dignified realist, and took responsibility for having created a modern and unprecedented evil. In his passage from contemplation to application, Oppenheimer would decide ultimate moral questions that were not asked of Picasso as he contemplated and then crafted his sculpture - nor would they ever for the potential of art to create evil, hovers somewhere near zero.

The moral justifications for Oppenheimer's decision are well known. From General Charles Willoughby, chief of intelligence for the Supreme Command of the Southwest Pacific, Oppenheimer knew that were he unsuccessful at creating the atomic bomb, a full scale invasion of Japan and its home islands would be unavoidable. American casualties were estimated to reach one million and not only that, he knew that in the early stages of the invasion 1,000 Japanese and American soldiers would be dying every hour. By comparison, estimates were that something over 100,000 Japanese would be lost in the immediate aftermath were two targets bombed. Oppenheimer also knew that however large the death count might become, it would be by no means unprecedented given that more than 250,000 Japanese had already died in American bombing raids on Japan's six largest cities. And so weighing these gruesome estimations Oppenheimer revealed to himself a relative goodness in the evil he would create in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

"And if the word "cowardly" is to be used, it might be more aptly applied to those who kill from beyond the range of retaliation, high in the sky, than to those willing to die themselves in order to kill others. In the matter of courage (a morally neutral virtue): whatever may be said of the perpetrators of Tuesday's slaughter, they were not cowards." When the late Susan Sontag suggested that "cowardly" was not the way to describe the men, who on the 11th of September sacrificed themselves for a cause to which their devotion was complete, she contemplated her opinion and with courage published her

essay in the pages of *The New Yorker*, but without having to cross the moral bridge between contemplation and application. As she herself admitted, courage is a morally neutral virtue. To make a moral decision, in order to pass from contemplation to application, is as rare in the arts, as it is common in the sciences, or for that matter, terrorism. The choice to turn an airliner into a bomb, to build the first nuclear weapon, or create a hybrid virus out of genetic alchemy, is, as they say, a "real" choice because it would be unprecedented. Who amongst us can point to the obvious moral choice that would cause goodness to come from an atomic explosion, an act of terrorism, or a mutant virus?

In the aftermath of September 11th some are now saying they can, and that it was only for the ascendancy of postmodernism's cultural relativism that it had not been evident before. Roger Rosenblatt writing in the *New York Times* said that American intellectuals, including Susan Sontag, would have to admit that moral relativity was now impossible, that we would have to face up to what is unambiguously real. "The consequence of thinking that nothing is real," Rosenblatt wrote, "is that one will not know the difference between a joke and a menace. No more. The planes that plowed into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were real. The flames, smoke, sirens — real. The chalky landscape, the silence of the streets — all real . . ." and then he concluded: "Are you looking for something to take seriously? Begin with evil."

But if the arts are to begin to take evil seriously, how will they go about it if moral decisions are beyond them? Theodor Adorno once wondered if passages of human suffering and engorged brutality rendered art meaningless. His question constitutes a vote of no confidence in art's ability to do more than point toward the moral straits where one passes from contemplation to practice. Artists like Hieronymus Bosch may depict imaginary monsters, or Robert Longo, man-made agents of evil, but these artists are not themselves dealers in the radical evil Rosenblatt means for us to contemplate. The rank of moral decisions required of other professions - the physician who decides that you will receive the liver transplant that would save my life, or the attorney who successfully defends someone he knows to be guilty, or the architects who built Auschwitz, - are not expected of artists when we do our work.

Aerial view Auschwitz

The example of the architects who built Auschwitz is a useful case study because the decisions of those architects are well documented. While the Germans burned the archives of the camp commander prior to their evacuation from Auschwitz in January 1945, the archive of the construction office, some three hundred yards away from the commandant's office, was overlooked and remained intact.

Werkmann plan

Georg Werkmann was the original architect for a new crematorium in Auschwitz; he made this drawing in autumn of 1941. Werkmann was tasked to design a crematorium, which could accommodate the mortality of the concentration camp at Auschwitz and the

prisoner-of-war camp at Birkenau. His architectural style was designed to fit the vernacular of the main camp. Here we see the ground plan and front elevation of Werkmann's first design. The incineration hall with the five furnaces occupies the center of the building. To the left are the fuel storeroom and rooms for the inmates working in the building; to the right are the two dissection rooms and the two-door elevator, opening onto both the incineration hall and the first dissection room that descends to the morgues below.

Werkmann plan

Here Werkmann's basement plan and back elevation. There is no basement below the incineration hall and the fuel storeroom. The elevator descends into a vestibule connected to the outside by two staircases, and there we find Werkmann's design for a chute for corpses affording the main access to the basement morgues. His chute design is an efficient, if undignified way to convey the dead inside the building. Werkmann was asked to design a crematorium to function for the efficient disposal of corpses, and these drawings, especially the inclusion of the chute for corpses, represent his elegant solution. But his design was never built leaving his drawings to provide the preamble to a story of transformation as the role of the crematoria evolved from a system for the disposal of corpses, to a facility for the murder of live human beings - and the burning of their corpses.

Building at Auschwitz, both in the concentration camp and in the town, was subject to normal civilian procedures meaning that building the death camps generated a vast paper trail: plans, budgets, letters, telegrams, contractors' bids, financial negotiations, requests for material allocations, and the minutes of meetings among the architects themselves.

Construction Estimate

Description of gas tight doors

These documents tell us a great deal. They reveal that Himmler's second visit to Auschwitz in July 1942 brought the decision to transform the crematoria from its original purpose, to a facility for mass murder.

Walther Dejaco plan

A second architect, Walther Dejaco, was hired in January 1942 to modify Werkmann's original designs and fulfill Himmler's new plan for the camps. Dejaco's evolved blueprint is more complex and informative. It was used to request building materials and permissions. The job of constructing the facilities was given to the Huta contracting firm whose construction plans we see here.

Huta contracting firm

Picture of construction

The plan was changed yet again in December 1942 with a relatively simple drawing showing Walther Dejaco's transformed design for the basement.

Walther Dejaco basement plan

He drew in an outside staircase descending from the yard next to the railway spur into a basement entrance to the crematorium.

Walther Dejaco plan

Dejaco's architectural solution, responding to Himmler's new objectives become clear when he changed one of Werkmann's original underground morgues into an undressing room

Section of the morgue of crematorium II

and the other into a gas chamber.

Section of the morgue of crematorium II

Dejaco's new entrance to the basement permitted the cancellation of Werkmann's plan for the corpse chute, because dead bodies are dropped through a chute, whereas live human beings would descend his staircases. Dejaco's simple plan was that the victims would walk to their death.

Were George Werkmann and Walther Dejaco evil? When they exercised their free will - just as Oppenheimer - did they too find goodness in evil? There is, of course, no Hippocratic Oath for architects, but we may still ask about the architect's decisions in the same spirit that we ask why Nazi doctors so cruelly betrayed the Oath. And perhaps an answer is provided by Dennis B. Klein who wrote in the *Journal of Holocaust Studies*:

The medical establishment in Nazi Germany cast the "Jewish question" as a public health problem, a "disease" that contaminated the body politic. Physicians presided over genetic health courts, administered genetic counseling centers, planned and carried out the "euthanasia" operations, and justified the selections and experiments on inmates in the camps as progressive medical practice.

Werkmann and Dejaco created evil by their architecture - just as Oppenheimer did with his bomb - and their free will was at their disposal to negotiate goodness from evil - just as Oppenheimer.

Let me go on to another example where Surrealism and geometric abstraction provided the inspiration for committing psychological torture in an early form of what we now call experience design. 65 years ago, during Spain's civil war the anarchist artist Alphonse Laurencic designed prison cells designed to produce a form of "psychotechnic" torture; it

was his contribution to the fight against General Franco's rightwing rebel forces, and therefore his own goodness teased from evil. By Laurencic's design, the 6ft by 3ft cells which were built in 1938, included beds placed at a 20 degree angle, making them near-impossible to sleep on, and floors of scattered geometric blocks to prevent prisoners from pacing.

The intended result was to leave prisoners with a single option: to stare at the walls, which were curved and covered with patterns inspired by Bauhaus artists such as Kandinsky, and Klee, and images stimulating paintings by Salvador Dali, all intended to cause mental confusion and distress. Lighting effects gave the impression that the walls were moving. And as a final touch, prisoners were forced to constantly view the infamously disturbing scene from Dali and Bunuel's film *Un Chien Andalou*, in which an eyeball is sliced open. The entire torture ensemble can only be called to mind infamous scenes from *A Clockwork Orange*.

Laurencic, Werkmann and Dejaco used architecture to act on their moral decision to move from contemplation to application, and however they may have justified it to themselves, we may still fairly accuse the three of having created evil. But what are we to say about an architect vastly more immanent who flirted with evil as he flirted with Hitler's fascism, but never acted on it? There is a period of Philip Johnson's life when he was capable of writing in a letter: "The German green uniforms made the place look gay and happy. There were not many Jews to be seen. We saw Warsaw burn and Modlin being bombed. It was a stirring spectacle." Johnson's was hardly a passing fascination - as late as 1940, he was defending Hitler to the American public. Mark Stevens wrote in the *New York Times* shortly following Johnson's death: "Today, any debate over an important figure with a fascist or Communist background easily becomes an occasion for blame games between right and left. Mr. Johnson is no exception. Morally serious people can have different views of his personal culpability." If Roger Rosenblatt is correct, that postmodernism's cultural relativism seems increasingly out of touch, and out of date, then can a relative difference exist between what Laurencic, Werkmann and Dejaco did and what Philip Johnson contemplated? Without doubt, Laurencic, Werkmann, Dejaco crossed the bridge using their free will to act on their beliefs, but how do we rank Johnson who stayed behind to contemplate "green uniforms and stirring spectacles" from a distance? Are there different degrees of evil according to where you stand on the moral bridge that connects contemplation to application? Is this the old possibility of being guilty but not responsible?

Evil appears for the first time in the third chapter of Genesis as a serpent whispering in Eve's ear. The serpent is there, as the pre-existing force of Satan's free will, with which he has passed from the contemplation of evil to its practice. With temptation Satan offers Eve the opportunity to use her divine offering - free will - to find a relative goodness in evil. Her use of reasoning foreshadows that of Laurencic, Werkmann and Dejaco as she finds a relative goodness in evil with the justification that knowing evil will better protect her from it, than would God's mere warnings against it. After Eve contemplated the temptation which would produce the fruit of knowledge, her first bite, represents her

application of evil. Though the devil made her do it, is Satan original author of evil? The question carries us snaking towards theology for answers.

This is the question Evodius posed to St. Augustine in their dialogue entitled On Free Choice of the Will. St. Augustine furnished a perfectly reasoned answer whose essence comes from Isaiah 5, 6 and 7 where we hear the voice of God in the first person: "I am the Lord" the passage reads, "making peace and evil." Nothing happens in the cosmos that is unknown to God, Christian theologians argue, and therefore God would have authored the greatest of evils, including the atomic bomb, the Holocaust, the events of September 11th. Evil cannot be an absolute, in and of itself, because that would impose a limitation on God who is not only eternal, but omniscient.

The question that naturally arises in anyone theologically minded is why God created evil, or how do we reconcile a good and loving God with one who would create evil. There have been an array of answers but at the center of nearly all of them is the issue of free will, God's gift to humankind. St. Augustine believed that God created evil to teach us wisdom, humility and kindness; a learning process that would prepare us for God. Augustine delicately wired "free will" to evil's usefulness as a teaching instrument because, he reasoned, without free will there would be no way to exercise a moral choice between good and evil.

To the angels God gave free will, and directly after creation some of them put it to work, making the now infamous moral decision to place their own will before God's. Those angels were summarily cast out of heaven, which, many years later, gave Milton the topic for his epic poem. As the Bible tells us, God gave moral discretion to Adam and Eve, which sponsored humankind's first mutiny against divine authority. Milton described their willful choice as sin, our perpetual condition:

Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste,
Brought death into the world *and all our woe* . . .

Even from evil - "all our woe" - God would find goodness St. Augustine reasoned: "God, when he created the Devil," he wrote, "was without doubt well aware of his future wickedness, and had foreseen the good that He himself would bring out of that evil." From Augustine's view, good exists in evil to reprove the power of God who can turn bad to good. "For God," he wrote, "would never have created a man, let alone an angel, in the foreknowledge of his future evil state, if he had not known at the same time how he would have put such creatures to good use and thus enrich the course of world history by the kind of antithesis which gives beauty to a poem." "All our woe," God's punishment for whoever used their free will to morally disobey, was an exceedingly powerful model

for radical evil until a tsunami-like earthquake destroyed Lisbon in 1755. In six minutes the earthquake killed a third of Lisbon's population, destroyed eighty-five percent of Lisbon's buildings, including its famous palaces, libraries, hospitals, and every cathedral. It was a catastrophe so tremendous as to have a transformative impact on European culture and philosophy, including revising the meaning of evil. Lisbon was the capital of a devout Catholic country, with a history of investments in the church and evangelization in the colonies. Moreover, the catastrophe struck on a Catholic holiday and destroyed almost every important church. For 18th century theology and philosophy, this manifestation of the anger of God was difficult to explain, and the goodness Augustine promised God had fore planned in causing such evil was impossible to imagine. The doubt that God could have caused such disaster is found in a letter from Voltaire dated November 24, 1755 where he wrote: "What will the preachers say -- especially if the Palace of the Inquisition is left standing! I flatter myself that those reverend fathers, the Inquisitors, will have been crushed just like other people. That ought to teach men not to persecute men: for, while a few sanctimonious humbugs are burning a few fanatics, the earth opens and swallows up all alike."

And so perhaps God is less responsible for the holocaust and the destruction of Lisbon and the torturers of the inquisition, perhaps each of us are left to use our free will, and find goodness in evil as did Oppenheimer and DeJaco – however sinful that decision may be. This apparent contradiction, but marvelous dilemma, belonged first to Milton's Satan, and was born out of necessity. Remember once again Lucifer's fall from Grace and stinging arrival in Hell. He is on his back on the fiery floor. He first sees his talented friend Beelzebub whose face is so terribly scarred that he only just recognizes him. Beelzebub's horrendous disfigurement provides Satan with a mirror of his own profound loss of grace, but there is no time for self-pity. Heroic realism takes over upheld by God's remaining gift to him: his free will. With it, he rallies what's left speaking these words:

Farewell happy Fields
Where Joy forever dwells: Hail horrors, hail
Infernal world, and thou profoundest Hell
Receive thy new Possessor: One who brings
A mind not to be changed by Place or Time.
The mind is its own place, and in it self
Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.
What matter where, if I still be the same,
And what I should be, all but less than he
Whom thunder hath made greater? Here at least
We shall be free; the' Almighty hath not built
Here for his envy, will not drive us hence:
Here we may reign secure, and in my choice
To reign is worth ambition though in Hell:
Better to reign in Hell, then serve in Heav'n.

If you are not so morally sophisticated as to have said your prayers this morning as a simple expression of hatred for Satan, then these are the deeply moving lines of a dignified realist. Either I can repent, surrendering selfhood with free will, Satan reasoned, or I will create a relative goodness out of radical evil. "Evil be thou my good" he swears. Here we may grant Satan courage, because as Sontag taught us, but what about goodness? Harold Bloom has wondered about the relative power and meaning of those words Milton lent to Satan. He has wondered why we should see them as more than the words of a "childish inverter of conventional moral categories." But Milton's Satan is far too complex a character to permit such a slender conclusion. With his infamous declaration Satan uses his free will to produce a radical inversion of moral categories by denying his own representation as evil. He succeeded in using his free will to broadcast original meaning from beyond the definition that heretofore described evil.

"Evil be thou my good" is the full expression of his free will and declares his decision to explore and know what goodness can be. It is, as Bloom later concedes, a matter of Satan saying: "I will be present wherever and whenever I choose to be present. If, for now, I only explore my own dens, at least I explore!" Free will fuels the monster's desire for knowledge over ignorance. Satan's foreshadows the decision taken by Edward Teller, the architect of the H-bomb, in debate with Robert Oppenheimer. To the question whether scientists should move ahead with research into ever more destructive atom bombs, Teller said: "There is no case where ignorance should be preferred to knowledge, especially if the knowledge is terrible." Teller, like Satan, nominated the free reign of free will, as nearly a sacred path to knowledge.

Satan creatively re-inscribed the meaning of evil, by refusing to be defined by God's prototypes for evil, and for that matter goodness. Respectful of Augustine's view - that good exists in evil only to reprove the power of God - perhaps we should credit God as the "uber- author" of Satan's inventiveness, and his appetite for knowledge. But whether by God's creative hand, or Satan's will it is still an ingenious expression arising from Satan's belief that once the prototype for evil becomes unsurpassable, the force of individual creativity is thwarted. It is in this sense that Satan can easily agree with Roland Barthes, whose well known observation, once paraphrased, would read that being "evil" for Satan had become a matter of fulfilling God's model for evil, and thus merely a blank virtue.

"Evil be thou my good," is an original moral decision Satan took freely. If Satan's declaration is the first of its kind, other like-minded assertions have streamed out from this original source. In the pages of "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" Oscar Wilde produced a radical inversion of moral categories by denying altruism's nominal representation as good will. He wrote: "They try and solve the problem of poverty, for instance, by keeping the poor alive, or in the vary advanced school, by amusing the poor. But this is not a solution: it is an aggravation of the difficulty. The proper aim is to try and reconstruct society on such a basis that poverty will be impossible. And the altruistic virtues have really prevented the carrying out of this aim . . . the worst slave owners were

the ones who were kind to their slaves, and so prevented the horror of the system being realized by those who suffered from it, and understood by those who contemplated it. . . " Wilde refuses the archetype of altruism as an expression of kindness, inverting our moral categories to discover how kindness becomes evil. Humane slave owners are no longer individuals the mind considers with relative grace.

Are there examples of visual artists who do more than contemplate evil, but who can cross from the contemplation of evil to its application declaring evil be thou my good? The overall social effects the modern arts have on the world are most often bestowed by risk-free, pre-packed forms such as the Christos' saffron-coloured gates. So negligible or intangible have any other effects been that, when Mohammed Bouyeri murdered filmmaker Theo van Gogh, the world was not only offended but shocked that art was the cause of it. But of course it wasn't; just as when the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini issued his *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie, Bouyeri murdered Van Gogh for having committed blasphemy, not art. Van Gogh, a slippery polemical populist played the antagonist to the Dutch ideal of tolerance; his repeated slurring of Muslims as 'goat fuckers' hardly rendered him the benevolent multi-culturalist. While the majority saw his film *Submission* as an agonizing appeal to basic human rights for Muslim women, Bouyeri registered only the sacrilege of an infidel. Van Gogh's murder was not about the power of art but about the power of religion; it is the evil abuse of women that survives.

In 1989, a year after Khomeini sentenced Rushdie to death for having written *The Satanic Verses*, the author declared 'What is freedom of expression? Without the freedom to offend, it ceases to exist.' Presumably Rushdie imagined his art had offended, that it had created an evil in the eyes of Islamic fundamentalists, but is this the point? Is it even true? In the aftermath of the *fatwa* Rushdie attempted to disarm religious absolutism with the sanctimoniousness of secular pluralism, missing the fact that Khomeini's argument with him was about his deism not about the quality of his writing, a distinction noted by Naguib Mahfouz, the winner of the 1988 Nobel Prize for Literature, who wrote that Rushdie did not have 'the right to insult anything, especially a prophet or anything considered holy'. He never suggested that Rushdie abandon literature. By contrast, the secular West so reveres artistic freedom that the art world rarely sees its own altruistic relativism in relativistic terms, a fact noted by Peter Medawar, who wrote in the *New York Review of Books* that 'any suggestion that an author should not write exactly as he pleases no matter what the offence he causes or what damage he does is greeted by cries of dismay and warnings that any such action would inflict irreparable damage on the human spirit and stifle forever more the creative afflatus'.

The jurisdiction of conflicts between cultural, religious, social and political freedoms is an unforgiving maze of competing interests, where enough artists follow Rushdie's lead, crouching behind the slumping barricades of free speech and cultural tolerance, perfecting their effete privilege to scandalize. That is no longer enough when everyone else is playing for keeps, fairly expecting that art's content should justify its scandals. A Russian court has just convicted the director and curator of the Andrei Sakharov Museum for inciting religious hatred, ruling that the 'Caution! Religion' exhibition was 'openly insulting and blasphemous'. The retribution that terrorists threaten

to exact for sacrilege is much higher. With freedom of speech less and less likely to trump other rival freedoms, and as artists stand idly by, judges, museum officials, politicians and terrorists prescribe the terms of the artists' relationship to the dominant culture, mostly rendering them in the unflatteringly shades of an ahistorical avant-garde, as 'transgressors without portfolio'. If artists wish to participate meaningfully in reforming our political, social, economic and cultural future, they will have to conceive of a way to evade representation by the dominant culture as the 'transgressor'; otherwise, they must quietly accept their assignment as pseudo-radicals, the spokespersons for cultural tolerance.

Compared to the arts, the sciences are accustomed to the risk of doing evil. In 1974 the National Academy of Sciences, charged with examining the threats associated with recombinant DNA research, recommended that certain experiments should be voluntarily deferred for ethical reasons, and they were. Four years later, underlining that moral obligation, Nobel Prize winner David Baltimore wrote an article on 'The Limits of Science', in which he upheld the right of a scientist to free discovery, or the creative contemplation of pure science, but with the caveat that restrictions might apply to its application. 'I want to make a crucial distinction', Baltimore wrote; 'the arguments for [unrestrained freedom] pertain to basic scientific research, not to the technological applications of science. As we go from the fundamental to the applied, my arguments fall away.' Is it odd that Baltimore's distinction between the contemplation and application of knowledge seems irrelevant, even repugnant, to the modern arts? Beyond the exceptional examples of Van Gogh's film and Rushdie's novel – each examples of religious, not artistic, transgression – why do the modern arts produce so few works necessary of being tested by the ethics that might cause them to be deferred? Ironically, that artists will tolerate no limitation on the application of their creative work casts the discipline as weak, as it sits in relation to the sciences and most other disciplines.

SLIDE AERIAL

To conclude, I would like to return to Auschwitz-Birkenau with a final example. Of all the aerial photographs taken of the death camp during the final year of the war, one stands out above all the others. The photograph I have in mind was taken on August 25, 1944, and was obviously intended to document the Gas Chamber and Crematorium II in the southwest corner of the camp. Like others, this picture bore labels applied by allied photo interpreters that identified buildings and various incriminating sites. Mostly they were labels one would expect to find on this sort of picture: "gas chamber," "undressing room," and "possible cremation pit." But one label was unexpected. Gazing down into the picture it is clear to see that within a few yards of the Crematorium there was a formal garden whose design is easily recognizable as the Cosmic Plan. The photo interpreters did not decipher its plan, but choose to label the garden descriptively. "LANDSCAPE." Traditionally, the center of a cosmic plan represents the Earth and is created out of four intersecting paths, which represent the rivers of paradise. Typically a tree or fountain will appear at the garden's center. The designers of the garden for Crematorium II chose to feature a tree. Because the garden was situated between the "entrance gate" and the

"undressing room." one has to imagine that for hundreds of thousands the unexpected garden provided their final glimpse of the world.

Certainly the garden was planted and maintained by The Agricultural Division stationed at Auschwitz. Under the direction of Dr. Joachim Caesar the Agricultural Division had become an important enterprise within the camp as early as 1941. Himmler, who had been an agriculturist, looked favorably upon Caesar's creation of the *Landwirtschaftskommando*, which was made up of prisoners assigned to cultivate the camp's landscape. One of the duties of the *Landwirtschaftskommando* was to plant tall hedges around many of the gas chambers and crematoria, including Gas Chamber and Crematoria II, and here is the order for the planting of these hedges or *Grüngürtel* (greenbelt). They were planted to disguise the inevitable from the uninitiated. Plainly said, camp administrators feared that the awful reality would unnecessarily alarm those being marched to the showers unless it was masked by the hedges. The cosmic garden was planted after the hedge went in around Gas Chamber and Crematoria II and therefore the timing invites the conclusion that the garden was originally and *only* intended for the eyes of those about to be gassed. Who decided to plant this garden, creating this small intersection of paradise within the belly of evil?

There is a partial answer in Bloom's comparison of the aspiration of Milton's Satan with a poet's artistic desire. As we know, Bloom reports that there was no flinching when Satan faced up to his circumstances upon his arrival in Hell. He was a dignified realist; "either repent and surrender your selfhood," Satan reasoned, "or create a relative goodness out of radical evil." Who was the dignified realist who authored the garden behind the hedge at Gas Chamber and Crematoria II? It was certainly a member of the *Landwirtschaftskommando*. Typically those assigned to the *Landwirtschaftskommando* were not immediately marked for death but were often like Anna Urbanova, a German Catholic who was condemned to Auschwitz as a political dissident. Unlike most of those who arrived at Auschwitz Anna possessed an option exceedingly rare within concentration camps. It was the same option thrust upon Milton's Satan. Anna and the others who built the cosmic plan garden could "repent," relinquishing their selfhood in order to join with their oppressors, or sustain their free will by exploring the limits of damnation, hoping to find a relative goodness. The cosmic plan garden at Gas Chamber and Crematorium II traces the limits of damnation and resonates with salvation only available near the monstrous heart of radical evil.

IDEOLOGUS OF THE REJECTED

BOYD RICE



Boyd Rice began his presentation with barrage of sounds he sampled through a digital delay using his own voice as the sound source. Snarling, groaning, and yelling, the echoing wail of a severely distorted voice resonated in the lecture hall. He was positioned in a corner with his back turned to the audience before approaching the lectern to shout a number of organized and repeated phrases that could now be heard very clearly. Images of DaVinci's war machines and simple geometric inkblots were being projected on the screens in sync with his aggravated dictation. Boyd recited:

Do you want total war? To through out Christ and bring back Thor? Do you want life to prevail!? Kick aside the weak and frail! Overturn the will of Man!? Let it burn and start again! Do you want total war!? Do you want total war!? Yes you want total war! Yes you want total war! Do you want to stand and fight!? Rip asunder, this pallid night!? Do you want total war!? Yes you want, total war!!! Total war!!! Total war!!! Total war!!!

After the performance, Boyd Rice sat down for an interview led by Ross Cisneros

ROSS

What I want to ask first is: Since the name of the fallen angel whether it be Satan, Lucifer, Beelzebub etc. has been appropriated and used in many of the presentations, I wonder if this properly represents the Satan you grew to know or know now.

BOYD

Well, Satan was really a minor figure early on in the Bible- Lucifer was the fallen angel. The Satan that the Church of Satan recognizes is just emblematic of being the total opposite of Judeo-Christian values. So, whatever Christians think are good values, we think are terrible values. But...I'm not...Bob Larson calls me an apostate Satanist. I'm not a spokesperson for the Church of Satan anymore.

ROSS

When did you withdraw from being a spokesperson for the Church?

BOYD

After the death of Anton LaVey- was a good friend of mine... but I've always been a Gnostic. I was a member of the Church of Satan, but I've always been a Gnostic, I've always believed in God.

ROSS

We've spoken for many months now leading up to this so I may take some things for granted. Can you describe what the goals and/or motivations are for the Church of Satan?

BOYD

I believe that they just think that the world is being corrupted by Judeo-Christian values for 2000 years and man has become weak and passive and man has lost sight of his true will- and that we should not see themselves as children of God but an animal like any other animal sometimes much worse than other animals.

ROSS

The Church preaches the idea of free will and was taken up by Ron's talk very concisely- and you have taken that that up in your own interventionist of prankster activity over the years, and I was wondering if you could describe some of the more important or effective pranks you were involved with over the ages.

BOYD

Uh, people are always asking me that but I can never remember the good ones but...a... this was a prank...a famous one...I gave a skinned sheep head to Betty Ford

Laughter

BOYD

On the nightly news it was the first thing Walter Cronkite talked about.

Laughter

ROSS

Do you remember how he talked about it?

BOYD

No. I was the only person not to see it- people would say to me "Did you hear Walter Cronkite by mention it?"

ROSS

So give us a little back-story on this sheep head...uh,

BOYD

I just saw it in the supermarket and I thought, what possible, reasonable use could you have for a skinned sheep head? It had the tongue coming out the side and the eyeballs in the sockets...and I just thought, "I'm sure there's something funny I could do with that."

Laughter

ROSS

So, maybe it's fair to say that Betty Ford was at the right place at the right time- or the wrong at the wrong

BOYD

She was as close to me as you are but she didn't see it. The secret service agent said, "That's not the kind of gift you should be giving to a lady."

Laughter

ROSS

Were you incarcerated for this?

BOYD

Uh, no- they threatened to take me out and tie me to a chair and leave me in the desert for a couple of days.

ROSS

The police told you this?

BOYD

Yeah, to give me time to think about what I had done. What had I done?

Laughter

ROSS

Well...the President's wife, you had a sheep's head- what, under your coat?

BOYD

I was carrying it- I was gonna give it to her. People were lining up to give her roses so I thought "...ha! I'm gonna check on something and be right back."

ROSS

Can you give us a sense on what it was like when you had this relationship with Anton LaVey, the Church of Satan was gaining momentum in San Francisco- what was the general social atmosphere in California, in that specific time and place that led to this kind of counter-cultural activity?

BOYD

The one I was involved with?

ROSS

Yes.

BOYD

Well, I think we found ourselves the most ultra-liberal city in the United States, perhaps on earth, and I didn't like it- it made me very reactionary. Anton LaVey was the only person that was saying "You should hate people if they deserve your hate." And I had grown up on this philosophy and I thought "Wow, this is the only person who has been saying these things since the 60's" -and, he started out in the middle of the peace and love era and yet he was saying "you should spite people who have done things against you, and strike people if they strike you."

ROSS

It seems like the orgiastic 60's that was rooted in the peace and love program grew up together, operating symbiotically, with these counter- cultural activities and what Charlie Manson did, in effect, was take advantage of this atmosphere. Am I right in saying that?

Yeah, absolutely

ROSS

And how did that pan out? Why is it important to consider the time and place that Charlie Manson invented himself?

BOYD

I think it gave him a unique opportunity- there were a lot of like- false messiahs hanging around Height/Ashbury as they were in Jerusalem in the time of Christ. Manson was just in the right place in the right time. But, if you don't remember the 60's, he was really a by-product of that time. He really took the ideas that were in the air and took them to their logical conclusion...such as uh, you know I grew up in Lemon Grove California and on the way to the shopping mall I would see slogans painted around like "Kill the Pigs"

and “SDS” and “The Weathermen” so there were people out there saying “You should kill the pigs.” You know, everyone over 30 is a pig. So, the youth would pick that up and absorb that in “Do you want a revolution” and all that stuff -they were ripe for that.

ROSS

Were the pigs also a part a socio-economic class?

BOYD

Yeah. Rich white people.

ROSS

Was Hollywood under critique by the youth that painted the slogans?

BOYD

Uh, I don’t think back in the 60’s everybody blamed the media for all their problems. I think now you have a lot more people saying the media is corrupt- but back then, it was just what you watched.

ROSS

These are the same pigs that were referred to in the Tate murders when they were painted in blood.

BOYD

Yeah, right.

ROSS

When and why did you start a conversation with Charles Manson?

BOYD

Well, at the time my favorite record that year was his first album called “Lie” and Black Flag was suppose to release new recordings of his and they flaked out on him so I sort of wrote to him and said “I’m in the music industry if you are interested in putting these songs out I could help you out with a deal.” So we started writing back and forth he said “You sound like a pretty good guy, why don’t you come over, I’ll try to put you on my list.”

ROSS

And you did go over.

BOYD

And I did. The guards told me I had a snowballs chance in hell to get on his list. They said, “There’s no way you can get on this guys list” But, a couple months later Manson wrote me and he said “Come on over.”

ROSS

So, What redeems Charles Manson as someone that any one person should be interested in him? What sets him apart? By the standard of law, he was a criminal and a musician- so what more?

BOYD

Well, he's a brilliant guy, he's fascinating, and he's very talented- he's a little bit of a paranoid schizophrenic and a sociopath.

ROSS

Yeah, it appears that way in his letters. I was wondering if you could explain- just taking this one response I got from him and after taking your advise of hooking him into a response by asking Manson to talk about Abraxas- what the "hall" is. So if you could just read it and then explain to us what he means.

Boyd reads from Charlie's letter

"You will Abraxas in the hall Easy, Charlie Manson"

BOYD

Well he could mean two things. He's always talking about the "hallways of always." and he says he spent his entire life walking back and forth down hallways- most of his life he's lived in the hallways. So, maybe he's identifying himself with Abraxas and saying that's where he came to know Abraxas, or maybe he's referring to this hall. You know his nickname for me was Abraxas. He said I'll call you Abraxas because you stand in two circles.

ROSS

Could you explain Abraxas for those who are not familiar with it?

BOYD

Abraxas is a Gnostic deity representing the balance between light and darkness, creative forces and destructive forces and what most people would consider as Good and Evil.

ROSS

You know, when Ron Jones was showing these slides of the interventions within the prison cell that limited the prisoner's pacing, I immediately thought of this- I remember you said it was something he (Charlie) had to do out of compulsion. Did he expand upon what the hallways of always were to him in terms of compulsive behavior?

BOYD

No, I think he just used it as an analogy for the eternal or truth or something.

ROSS

Well, read this one. We only spent an evening together so I was wondering if you could decode that one since you know him best.

BOYD

Yeah you know whenever I do my little Charlie anecdotes I sort of use a little Charlie voice. Ross wanted me to do this.

Boyd reads Charlie's second letter.

"You're no faker. A cat, a rat, big brain, little brain. It was a big ship, and your friend sank the Titanic. Let's see, they will shut you up if you get close, but you don't want to play dumb. Ding 'a ling 'a bling blong. Easy, Charlie"

ROSS

Is this usually how he writes?

BOYD

Yeah.

Laughter.

ROSS

Is he a comedian?

BOYD

Yeah. He's (slams down on table for emphasis) He's totally a comedian. He's one of the funniest people I've ever met. The last time I saw him the guards were trying to put the handcuffs on him and he kept crackin' jokes and busted them up- and these big burly guys were bent over in pain with laughter saying "Charlie! Please stop, please stop, I can't breathe!" and I thought God, he could just walk out of prison telling jokes all the way and be out down the road. (Laughter) So if he ever got out, he'd make a good living in standup.

ROSS

Well, this wasn't a prank but maybe as you say, it was a mishap. Tell us how you ended up with a bullet in the penitentiary where Charlie Manson was held when you went in to meet him.

BOYD

Don't you ever have a bullet in your pocket and you kinda know its in there and you can't find it and you go through the metal detectors and "EHHHH!!!" (buzzer sound) It was one of those situations. (laughter) Nobody believes it was an accident but that's my story and I'm sticking to it.

ROSS

Well, I can't argue with that. Fair enough... So you were detained? Stayed in prison for a night?

BOYD

Yeah, a couple nights. Charges were dropped- but it was a nice eh, the prison in Marin county was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright so it's really kinda bitchin' and futuristic. (laughter) But if you ever go there, don't let anybody know you know who the architect is cause they'll say (yelling)"What the hell are you talking about? Frank Lloyd who?! Shut up!" I pretty much got my ass kicked for that.

Ross begins asking a question and is interrupted by Boyd as he taps an unknown substance on his hand and snorts it in with his left nostril.

(laughter)

ROSS

I want to ask...It's a straight question, but I want to hear it. Is Charlie Manson Evil?

BOYD

Um, I don't think so. There was a sociologist named Marcello Truzzi who wrote an essay called Satan is a Fascist, and he said the 20th century trinity of Evil is Adolf Hitler, Charlie Manson, and Anton LaVey. So, I've known 2 of the 20th century's trinity of Evil and I didn't find either of them to be really Evil per se. I mean Charlie is obviously misguided- he's actually done horrible stuff- Anton LaVey is just a guy who had heretical ideas that a lot of people disagreed with and is presented as Evil just for having ideas that the mainstream didn't like.

ROSS

How do you feel it is useful to appropriate signifiers of Nazi or fascist aesthetic into your own aesthetic as an artist and as a musician?

Well, I like the fascist aesthetic because it implies order. I'm into order and symmetry, I like militarism because in the military you have a goal you need to attain, tactics and strategies to attain the goal. Most people I know don't recognize any order in the world and don't apply any tactics or strategies to their life- and it's so easy to do. I know that anything I want to do, I can do it- I just have to go after it in an orderly fashion.

ROSS

Do you find it contradictory in any way that the Church of Satan tries to develop a sense of individuation and free will among members while the fetish aesthetic is that of an army group think?

BOYD

Haven't you heard the new slogan "An Army of one?" I'm an army of one.

ROSS

Yes, yes...that's what I was getting to.

BOYD

Well, you are using the Church off Satan's standards to apply this. I don't really buy into the myth of individuality and free will. I've seen very few people who seem individualistic to me- and I don't know how much free will we have. Most people I know are compelled by their instincts or lack of instincts but it seems like they are always *compelled* to behave a certain way.

DE LAMA LAMINA

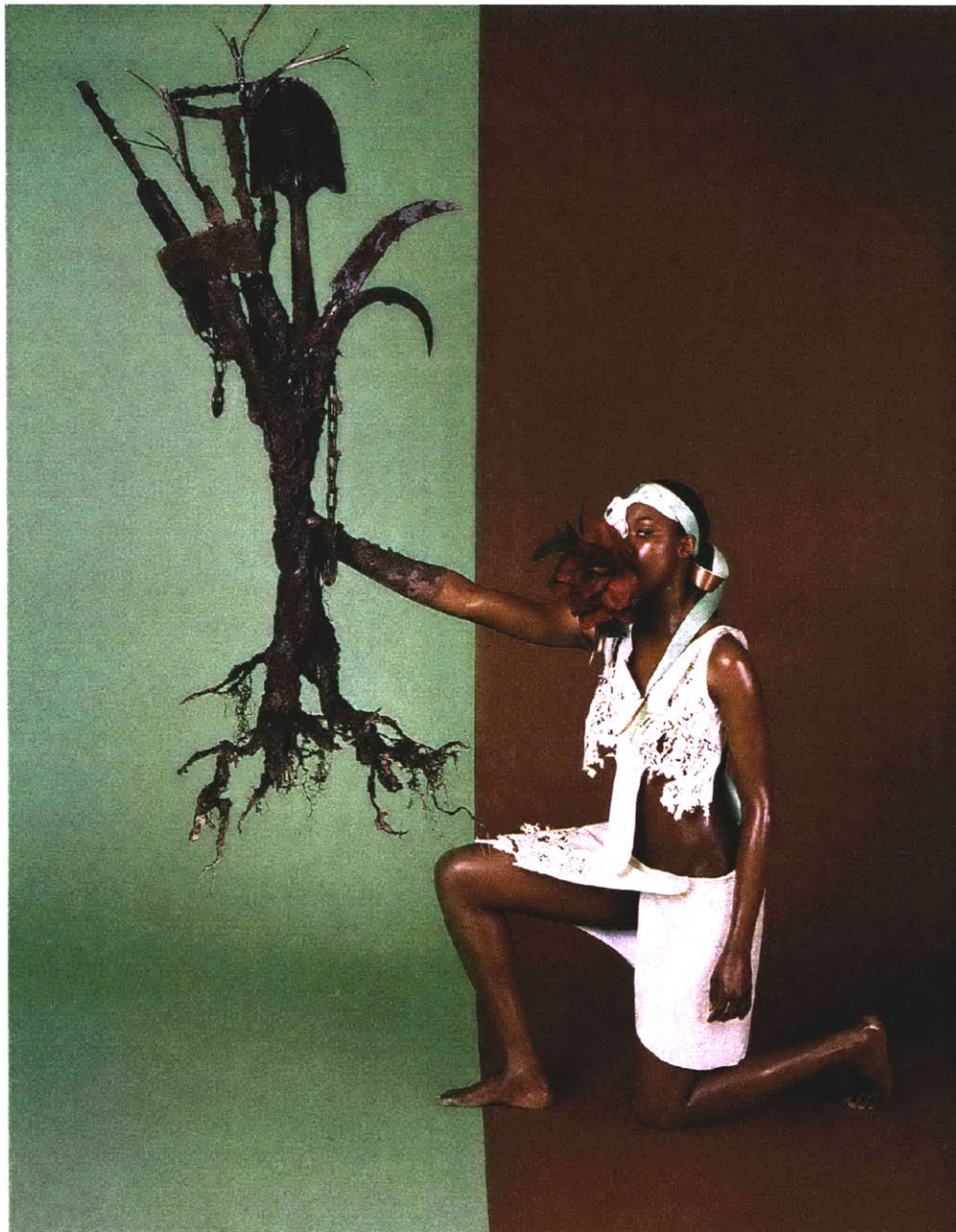
**MATTHEW BARNEY 2004
35MM PROJECTION**

INTRODUCTION BY ROSS CISNEROS

Perhaps the most memorable summation for Matthew Barney was written by Michael Kimmelman of the New York Times who dubbed him “the most important artist of his generation.” This Olympian statement is no small claim- it is a statement with a large vision- and indeed, what I admire in Barney’s work is his enormous vision that follows a special hierarchy of investigation, poetics, and beauty. I was naturally drawn to his narratives for this occasion because I believe his work to be tied to the tradition of the mystics, those who remind us of animal magnetism, those who acknowledge that we are not so far from the ancient self, from the material functions of the body: food, feces, blood, sex- and that through poetic revelation, these truths may be renewed. It was through the works of Hieronymus Bosch, Bruegal, the texts of Piero Camporesi, and those in *his* library that I was able to place Barney’s work within the context of this summit. Each of them shows ugliness, technology, crime, deformity, negation, restraint, and the passions of humankind within the much larger constellation of mortal fantasy. De Lama Lamina was produced during Carnaval de Salvador, in Bahia, Brazil and collaborated with musician Arto Lindsay. The Candomble *orixá* (deity), Ogun, became the organizing principle of this project, referenced under the juxtaposition of Ossain, one of his mentors. Ogun is the deity of war and iron, while Ossain, patron of leaves, knows all the secrets and medicinal properties of plants. Ogun lives in the flames of the blacksmith’s forge, on the battlefield, and more particularly on the cutting edge of iron. His nature is ambivalent, possessed with the power to destroy as well as to construct. A lone figure stands at the top of a tree - this is the character of Julia Butterfly Hill, an ecological activist who spent two years (1997-1999) living at the top of a two hundred foot Great Redwood Tree in California in efforts to save the tree and its neighboring forest from clear cutting. The rest will be revealed in the film. I asked Matthew to provide an introduction for this work and how he believed it would function today. Instead, he asked that I describe how it functioned within my vision of today’s subject. It did not occur to me to introduce this work as being limited to the Bad or those subjects in connection with Evil. I felt it had stronger association with the understanding of Abraxas in showing us deeply entranced in the Pleroma while parading with the machine that stubbornly marches in precession alongside (and in this case containing) the equally stubborn libido of the organism. I also felt that Matthew’s contribution offered a point of interest that differed tremendously from those views we have explored today as limited to relations among *Homo sapiens*. In this film, the relationship we have to the *living earth* and the violence committed to this greater organism is held in suspension as a question, as a mystery, and one that is perpetuated. I believe this work stands for itself and by itself and required no further extrapolation. I want to thank Matthew Barney, Alexander Lee, Rosalie Benitez, and Gladstone gallery for their trust and commitment towards the success of this project. You are all very generous.

I will end here with a passage from Alexander of Hales from the 13th c. Summa Halesiana, II.

Evil as such is misshapen... Nevertheless, since from Evil comes good, it is therefore well said that it contributes to good and hence it is said to be beautiful within the order of things. Thus it is not called beautiful in an absolute sense, but beautiful within the order. In fact, it would be preferable to say: “the order itself is beautiful.”



Matthew Barney
DE LAMA LAMINA, 2004
Production Still
Copyright 2004 Matthew Barney
Photo: Chris Winget
Courtesy Gladstone Gallery



Matthew Barney
DE LAMA LAMINA, 2004
Production Still
Copyright 2004 Matthew Barney
Photo: Chris Winget
Courtesy Gladstone Gallery

FALLOUT SHELTER

Shortly after the summit's end, it became clear that a group of Neo-Nazis had been present in the audience and were presumably in support of Boyd Rice. This was brought to attention through a series of violent email messaging and online blog activity intended to humiliate and cause fear in Jodi. The hate mail was at first an open retaliation against the critical comments made by Jodi regarding the President's politics. The unsettling metastasis of the world-wide-web caused the attacks on Jodi to spread like wildfire in the very public arena of the internet. As if in a public confessionary, the Neo-Nazi party exposed their hatred of intelligent woman, so-called liberals, academia, and most interestingly, any criticism toward their favored president George W. Bush. Jodi, who had become friendly with Boyd throughout their time together, became fearfully doubtful of Boyd's ethical position. The initial incendiary messages that were of greatest concern were removed and deleted from Jodi's archive. They were unspeakable comments and will not be re-printed- not out of censor but out of the academic discretion necessary to sift out the useful from the useless.

Excerpts from the online exchanges

April 04, 2005

Evil art

The Evil Summit I participated in yesterday at MIT was interesting. Everyone else involved was an artist so I was out of my element. I don't know very much about art at all, especially the contemporary art world of magazines like Art Forum. So I learned a lot Julian LaVerdiere was funny and interesting. He gave a slide presentation of his work, which includes the two light towers that went up in NYC six months after 9/11. I liked the way he contextualized the towers of light in earlier light domes by Leni Riefenstahl and Albert Speers, a contextualization lost on makers of 2 light towers 9/11 souvenirs. I also liked his American eagle wrecking ball.

Another participant was **Boyd Rice** --a counterculture figure, industrial music icon, and former priest in the Church of Satan. He was very nice, charming soft voice, pleasant demeanor. And, he was dressed as a fascist (no fascist symbols, though, just Satanic--I think). Some of his fans, also dressed as fascists, came to the summit. Boyd gave a remarkable performance of a piece (song? poem?) called **Total War**. It struck me as the 'truth' of Bush and Cheney's militarism. Yet, it could also be hailing young and future fascists. I recognize that these are two elements of the same thing (the Laibach, over-identification issue). Yet, is there a critical edge when people respond and are interpolated as fascists. **Boyd** is an avowed social Darwinist, by the way. The fact that his art, and his self-presentation, is so troubling is probably good. It may even be an indication that counter cultural art forms have taken over (if not always had) the role of art in contemporary society--they are capable of shocking, disturbing, provoking, affecting, in ways that institutionalized academic art cannot.

A much better version of this argument was made by Ronald Jones. He said that art can't do evil because today it is not serious. Culture frames art in an unserious way; it makes exceptions for artists and doesn't take them seriously. So the past and potential impact of art is dissipated, removed, immunized. It's just art.

So, can art do evil? I don't think evil is a useful concept. So, does art have some sort of moral and political responsibility? Or is it just art?

Anyway, one of the questions

Posted by Jodi Dean on April 04, 2005 at 11:26 AM in Academe, Evil, Ideas | Permalink

TrackBack

TrackBack URL for this entry:

<http://www.typepad.com/t/trackback/2177997>

Listed below are links to weblogs that reference Evil art:

Comments

Wow, that sounds like an amazingly great meeting. Evil and art -- those are two things I like to think about. Anyway, certainly the problem with art that either satirizes "evil" political systems by clothing itself in the mechanisms of those systems or art that purports a violent or rebellious solution/reaction to fascist-totalitarian-capitalist regimes lends itself to misinterpretation and abuse. As a mainstream music example, think Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the U.S.A." which became a gun-toting republican truck-driving pro-war chant during the first Iraq war, which was exactly the opposite of Springsteen's intentions. Then there's punk, which originally was an anarchistic movement against any established regime, but which eventually was adopted by skinhead neo-Nazis and ultimately the capitalist market (that horrid Hot Topic chain -- owned and operated by republicans) because they saw it as something from which they could derive financial profit while also promoting a White Agenda. And the list goes on and on and on. The sad truth is that there are just not that many people who have learned/been taught to understand and interpret art. They understand mass media, commercialism, and Fox News, and those are the sources that inform their experience of art. So sadly, the real message of much transgressive art is not only lost on the mainstream public, but it is co-opted and used for "evil" purposes.

Damn, I hope that makes sense. Got to go back to work now.

Posted by: Kim Dot Dammit | April 4, 2005 01:20 PM

Kim, your attunement to the question of context is really important. So-called radical art that clothes itself in what it ostensibly rejects cannot account for its own reception, how folks hear or see or receive it will always be out of its hands and subject to all sorts of reinterpretations. And, this is compounded by the second issue you point out, the commercial context that informs the experience of art, and of self-presentation. Is it really all that radical when advertised at the mall?

Posted by: Jodi | April 4, 2005 10:13 PM

Hi! Random Australian academic here popping my head in...

Just a viewpoint on a perceived history here: The way that early Satanists interpolated fascism was very deliberate; the principle of **total** opposition laid out by LaVey in the Satanic Bible meant that during the late 70s and early 80s, you had to oppose the masters of **war** and treachery, but also oppose a mean-spirited but ultimately more humane response by the counter-culture.

Boyd Rice is a putz in my book, but examining his politics, you'll find a more compelling and compelled point of view than many other cultural commentators. The idea of absolute narcissism and vague but persistent outsider-ness requires a critique of image capitalism - it has to - but that angle, call it Goth if you must, also interpolates something which seems incoherent to that resistance - waste, excess, tribunal by authority. Microfascisms abound in Goth cultures, I feel.

"It may even be an indication that counter cultural art forms have taken over (if not always had) the role of art in contemporary society--they are capable of shocking, disturbing, provoking, affecting, in ways that institutionalized academic art cannot."

I agree. Art is a joke about the Turner prize once a year and a gusset-choking buffet counter for arts workers in-between PissChrist controversies in a broader sense... but at the other end, art's function is much more complex in places like poor communities in urban areas in a way counter-cultural art isn't ever going to do.

But they make computer games critical of US foreign policy now, so who knows anymore!

Posted by: Christian McCrea | April 5, 2005 03:44 AM

Hi Jodi,

I wanted to thank you for your participation in the conference Sunday; your talk was inspirational in the way it generated connections and systems in the language of evil used in presidential speeches, though somewhat foreboding because of its density and language (and by that I do NOT mean to say you should dumb it down, on the contrary, ideas that complex urgently need representation). I was the guy with the not-so-great mohawk who asked the final question about how art might engage with the transgressive aspects of evil fruitfully while not adopting the destructive imperative that seems to power most visions of **total** abandon. This question was rhetorical for myself, doubly so with **Boyd Rice** there, because I feel that the way to do this is to become 'living performance', to use sub-cultural symbology to combine existing and generate new perceptions of what is possible; to be 'militant' or 'a warrior' in the sense of being present

and passionate and pursuing a vision of greater meaning, but simultaneously allowing change to come as necessary to avoid dogmatic belief and limiting fascistic force; in essence, to be an expressive regenerating source of art and meaning that is capable of response, like metaphysical AI that you interact with.

And I realize with that last sentence I clearly have catapulted myself into the stereotypes for 'rambling' and possibly 'pedagogical'. Anyways, just my two cents. I do wish **Boyd** had responded to my question though, as it was essentially directed at him...

Posted by: Gregory Blouin Souza | April 5, 2005 01:58 PM

Christian,

That's a fascinating history. Have you written more on this or could you direct me to some other sources on the incorporation of fascist imagery? I'd also like to hear more about what underlies the 'putz' attribution. As should be clear, I am astoundingly ignorant about all this--you'll be writing on a blank slate!

Gregory--thanks so much for your kind words. I think your question was extremely important and ideally there would have been more conversation on exactly that point--it gets to the heart of what the summit was supposed to summons! Your notion of living performance is intriguing--especially as it creates new sense of the possible (Ranciere refers to this in terms of a politics of the perceptible). I can say that I was unsettled by the guys dressed as fascists. And, I was unsettled by the fact that I was unsettled. But this, I think, is good, and may be what you are talking about: my regular categories and ways of thinking didn't apply, they were called into question. Were I to extend this in perhaps an ethical direction, I should have simply asked the guys, talked with them, rather than letting them remain other and assuming I knew their message. What do you think?

Posted by: Jodi | April 5, 2005 06:26 PM

Maybe you didn't see your review of your speech by **Mike Z.**

<http://www.overthrow.com/lsn/news.asp?articleID=7949>

Mike Z's review taken from the web

Boyd was seated next to a woman who looked about forty but was dressed like a teenager on her way to a nightclub. I figured this was Boyd's consort, so I was quite amazed to hear her introduced as not only our next speaker, but the chair of some no-name college's Political Science department. She revealed that she not only dresses like a bimbo, but pontificates like one as well, giving us a rambling hour-long lecture on how brainless and provincial G.W. Bush is. I love 21st century scholasticism. This was now phase three of the conference and still nobody had touched on the day's topic.

My friend UK Dan woke me briefly during this woman's sermon to tell me he just witnessed Boyd Rice tap some substance onto his forearm and snort it up his nose. Come on, I told him, you've gotta be mistaken. Nonetheless, I kept an eye on Boyd for a while and sure enough I witness him taking out some ampoule, tapping a powder onto his forearm and unmistakably snorting it in the MIT amphitheater!

When Buffy the Bush Slayer finally wrapped up her litany of liberal drollery, UK Dan and I cavorted up to Boyd Rice, shared some small talk, and casually asked what he had been inhaling. He claims it was snuff tobacco and "gives you one hell of a rush." Take that any way you want. We commiserated over the vapidness of the last speaker and Boyd made my day by admitting he's never voted in his life but registered in '04 just to put in a ballot for W.

We went out for lunch and missed the third speaker who was some Swedish Art Professor. We re-entered just in time for Boyd's session. The NON rune with the Orobouros was projected magnificently over the lecture hall (see photos), the lights dimmed and he started off with "Do you want TOTAL WAR? Yes, you want TOTAL WAR..." After a long, awkward silence, our mediator begins a Q&A session with Boyd, who answers flippantly, swears, and brags about stealing supplies from CA warehouses with Mark Pauline. Just as the mediator is starting to realize the awful mistake he made in inviting Boyd Rice to participate in an academic conference, Boyd brings his little box back out, taps out some powder, and snorts a line IN FRONT OF A LIVE COLLEGE AUDIENCE.

Everyone is too shocked to react, but the SECOND TIME he does it, the mediator stops mid-sentence and nervous murmurs permeate the crowd. "It's snuff!" Boyd yells. Maybe he thought university speakers casually use tobacco products mid-lecture. Note my photographs of Boyd Rice snorting a substance in front of a crowded lecture hall.

"**Boyd** was seated next to a woman who looked about forty but was dressed like a teenager on her way to a nightclub. I figured this was **Boyd's** consort, so I was quite amazed to hear her introduced as not only our next speaker, but the chair of some no-name college's Political Science department. She revealed that she not only dresses like a bimbo, but pontificates like one as well, giving us a rambling hour-long lecture on how brainless and provincial G.W. Bush is. I love 21st century scholasticism. This was now phase three of the conference and still nobody had touched on the day's topic.

"...When Buffy the Bush Slayer finally wrapped up her litany of liberal drollery, UK Dan and I cavorted up to **Boyd Rice**, shared some small talk, and casually asked what he had been inhaling. He claims it was snuff tobacco and "gives you one hell of a rush." Take that any way you want. We commiserated over the vapidness of the last speaker and **Boyd** made my day by admitting he's never voted in his life but registered in '04 just to put in a ballot for W."

I think people agree that anyone whose idea of evil is limited to ranting about Bush and Cheney's militarism is extremely immature.

The Church of Satan, BTW, is a Jewish interpretation of Satanism and fascism (LaVey, etc, all Jews).

Somehow, though, CoS members hate it when I tell them that ...

Fascism though is not so bad in practice. National socialism is superior, because it adds that essential element of race, blood and soil. Transcend that with spiritual race and you have Radical Traditionalism. And then you are there.

;-D

Posted by: Bill White | April 5, 2005 10:45 PM

| TrackBack

April 06, 2005

Comments deleted and access blocked

Hi folks,

An email from Kim alerted me to some comments that appeared here last night. They were from a Nazi supporter of Boyd Rice's who attended the MIT Evil Summit. I am really glad for the warning because the comments have shaken me up quite a bit. I deleted most of them (and in the process one from George as well). I have also blocked the Nazi poster from posting further on the site. The first and primary reason I deleted the comments and blocked him from the site is that I don't want icite coming up in any anti-Semitic searches or to be linked to the sort of hate that 'Bill White' preaches. The second reason is that I want icite to be a blog where disagreement is done from a prior kind of trust and solidarity, out of kindness and in terms of if not common hopes then hopes for some kind of commons in the future.

I left some of 'Bill White's' comments that were targeted at me in particular. Maybe out of masochism, maybe as a reminder of the edges and hate from which I am usually thankfully sheltered, maybe as some kind of proof that I'm not scared of criticism, maybe even because I worry that they are somehow true (do I really dress that badly?). I also left the comments as evidence of the dangers of assuming the meaning of a performance (and as evidence for some of what Christian posted with regard to the history of Satanism and fascism). The guys I wondered about in the audience really are Nazis. Interestingly, they are really Bush supporters as well. So, the issue of 'over identification' remains in a way that, in my view at least, doesn't have the kind of disruptive potential Zizek sees (Kim said as much in her earlier post on evil art as well).

April 07, 2005

From Boyd Rice

I got this email from Boyd and post it here with his permission:

J--- i was saddened & dismayed to hear about your situation. Although i am utterly apolitical, due to some harsh opinions held by me i have long been deemed a "Nazi" by certain factions of people who don't bother to look beneath the surface of things. most people are able to contextualize some of my more seemingly extreme viewpoints, but there will always be some at either end of both political extremes who either can't do that or simply don't care to. i have put up with similar threats & name-calling from the far left for years, & even though they imagine themselves to be the good guys, their actual behavior is identical. it's cowardly & thuggish. if i have an issue with someone i tell them to their face, but this sort of person doesn't want a discourse obviously. they need an enemy, someone who can be the villain so that they can wear the white hat. i really enjoyed meeting you, & even though we may not see eye to eye on a good many things, i never take it personally when a person's ideology differs from mine. in fact, i find it mind-boggling that anyone out there doesn't expect to encounter as many differing opinions as there are human beings. perhaps this is my last vestige of misguided idealism, as experience has shown me time & time again that a lot of humans thrive upon irrationality. indeed, i've spent years investigating the dark side of humanity & don't expect to it's influence on our history diminished any time soon. at any rate, it's been my experience that the sort of person who gets angry over a mere idea or statement of opinion is someone out of step with the real world. they are capable of sending anonymous emails or calling in a bomb threat & derive enough emotional satisfaction from the act of expressing their rage that that's as far as it goes. let's hope that's the case here. wishing you all the best, boyd

Posted by Jodi Dean on April 07, 2005 at 09:03 PM in Evil | Permalink | Comments (2)

Comments

Well, I'll be goddam, Jodi, you sly fox--anyone knows 'dressing that badly' does not mean 'dressing like a whore' at around 40. I was so RELIEVED I almost passed out: I was expecting to read about ill-fitted woolen something or other in drab style or maybe even Margaret Warner and other shthead media stars who still wear the electric-blue or fire-engine red blazers with the chrome brooch; wouldn't be caught dead wearing sleeveless sheaths and gowns in the warm weather like Beatrice on Le Journal. Honey, I'm older than you are (and so show-biz oriented I'm into 'kiss and don't tell' about my exact age) and I DRESS LIKE A WHORE-I even dress like some METROSEXUAL WHORE and I just think I am fucking gorgeous! Didn't you know that Lana Turner's parents were both Alabamans and moved to Idaho just in time for her not to be known as a pure Southern belle...of course, she couldn't have done anything but the 'fiddle-dee-dee' part of Scarlett,

because she was a whore-actress, I mean there has to be a balance.

That wondrous moment taken care of, I adore your attitude about comments and hope you can legislate it properly. It calls to mind a recent closing of all comments on a blog I liked until the incendiary comments must have gotten in the way of the endless controversy about the comments, so the comments were abruptly closed with much less provocation than there had been when commenters were at each others' throats. I found this annoying and either out of control or over-controlling. I have ceased to read this blog, because the comments had become the issue, the blogger had the ability to censor comments, and instead threw out the whole plant! Oh well, no big deal, but there it is.

Posted by: Patrick J. Mullins | April 6, 2005 01:37 PM

Oh great, now everyone is just going to remember me as the guy who got censored along with the Hannah Arendt hating neo-Nazi.

(And not that I should be pushing it at this point....)

But I do wonder though..."prior trust and solidarity"? Really? Before you were pitting liberals and posties and watching the fur fly...and it was fun. So was that ok just because there are within the liberal consensus to not cross certain lines (like saying bad things about the Jews)? What about some overzealous communist (Zizek reader?) who advocates killing of capitalists in the name of radical change, or someone who really hates all Americans? Do they get deleted as well? Or is that kind of radicalism acceptable in a lefty blog?

I am reminded here of Zizek's introduction to Revolution at the Gates where he talks about the liberal Denkwerbot on radical thought. How many others will be silenced in the name of this "kindness"? Where will you draw the line?!? (rant, rant, rant...)

(Although it does not help my righteous case any that this guy could not make a coherent "unacceptable" argument, and just dropped pronouncements and insults.)

(And yes, my 2am ramble was pretty damn stupid and I am actually glad you removed it from the "symbolic register".)

(And you knew I was kidding about the Jews...right?)

Posted by: George W. | April 6, 2005 02:24 PM

Patrick,

Your metrosexual reassurance made me proud to dress like a whore. At my age, I've earned it! Thanks so much!

Posted by: Jodi | April 6, 2005 05:09 PM

George,

Even though I knew your comments were kidding, I didn't think that they seemed like

they were kidding in the context of a discussion with a Nazi. And, for me, tone is important in the discussion. How many will be silenced? I don't know. It will be on a case-by-case basis. Since icite is one of over 5 million blogs, I'm not too worried about it qua silencing. The whole thing does make me have to think more seriously about political violence and revolution. I am clear that I don't think it should be celebrate, that it is not an end in itself, that it isn't purifying. On the prior trust and solidarity, absolutely--debate requires a context, some forms of shared understanding. The same is true with meaning; meaning requires limits--non-meaning, nonsense, etc. So, this site isn't one designed to promote debate with conservatives (although some come by from time to time). It's designed to promote discussion and reflection among people with various sorts of liberal and left views, folks who are critical of capitalism, fascism, racism, anti-Semitism, sexism, and are interested in trying to think through and perhaps contribute to building a new kind of left vision. This might sound all too grand for this little blog, but why not think big?

Posted by: Jodi | April 6, 2005 05:22 PM

The essence of discourse is provoking expenditure of energy. If you agree with Bataille, you might see how these Nazis and you are yin and yang, and together you feed what keeps discussion about change alive.

But you might not like me either, as I'm a nihilist and I listen to death metal. I dress badly, but not whorishly.

Posted by: S.R. Prozak | April 6, 2005 08:20 PM

Apparently Aryans now communicate in mp3s...

I guess this is what you get for blocking extremists...

Posted by: George W. | April 7, 2005 09:47 AM

Hey, um

Your efforts to block me didn't work.

And you're a weenie.

And I don't support Bush, you nutball.

Grow up.

Bill

Posted by: Bill White | April 7, 2005 06:04 PM

Oh, and, ironically

You may ban me from your blog but my website's commentary on you will probably be in the top ten Google search results for your name within a week.

:~))

Bill

Posted by: Bill White | April 7, 2005 06:05 PM

Dear Libertarian Socialist,

a) Now I've heard of Jodi Dean, but who the fuck is Andrew **Boyd**, and why does he think that putting swastikas, clowns and boobs together make him a creative artist? (Although he does seem to be pretty good at the whole tight black uniform homoerotica thing.)

b) If she dresses like a teenage bimbo, and is the Pol Sci chair of a private college, does this not suggest that the woman has some mad academic skillz? And are you actually protesting that she did not dress to fit the popularly accepted stereotype of academics? Did that perhaps disturb or confuse you?

c) And no, most people on this blog do see a big difference between neo-cons, GOPers, fascists, etc - the only uniting thing being that we really don't fancy any of them. Do you however see a similarity between W's Patriot Act and Libertarian ideals?

"Buffy the Bush Slayer"...that's actually kinda funny.

Posted by: George W. | April 6, 2005 02:39 AM

First, the woman is clearly not that bright, just long winded.

Second, I didn't write the thing, I just posted it.

Getting promoted to a minor bureaucratic post in a minor university requires no more intellect than getting promoted to a minor bureaucratic post in a minor government agency. Having read this blog, all I see is that this woman knows how to use lots of words without really saying anything -- which seems to be characteristic of most academics. Demonstrate she knows how to survive in the real world, and I'd be more impressed.

What I think may be beyond you is this -- a woman who looks like she's forty and dresses like a whore is humorous -- not "disturbing" or "confusing". It indicates the person has an improperly developed identity structure, or is deliberately trying to make a joke. Most people instinctively sense when something is wrong with other people, even if they don't use big words like "identity structure". Like, for instance, I can sense something is wrong with you because you think dressing inappropriately means a woman is "challenging stereotypes" rather than "looking like an ass".

And the biggest link between the PATRIOT Act and the Libertarian Party? They're both the products of warped Jewish philosophy. Neo-cons, Ayn Rand, Morray Rothbard, Ludwig Van Mises -- all the same garbage.

Posted by: Bill White | April 6, 2005 08:22 AM

Jodi, you know the 'bimbo' charge is only launched at women who look ravishingly, threateningly lovely. You go girl.

Posted by: Alphonsevanworden | April 6, 2005 11:44 AM

Thanks, AvW! I shall now wear the label proudly! Bimbo is much, much, better than hag!

Posted by: Jodi | April 6, 2005 11:54 AM

Thank for the reply!

I felt much the same about the Nazi impersonators (we were actually seated right behind them). My knee-jerk reaction was "I fucking hate fascists!", but I reasoned that this wouldn't get me very far in terms of learning from them, plus I couldn't know whether or not they were just **Boyd** supporters in costume. They listened attentively throughout the whole conference, so I more or less forgot about them by the end. Given the subsequent comments though, it appears that they were indeed unhappy with idea that deconstruction of language could be useful, and prefer its dogmatic, sloganistic and absolutizing functions. I was also too intimidated to actually talk to them and find out what they were about, but it seems I spared myself some grief at the expense of knowledge (not usually a fair trade).

Fascism is totally and utterly different than the kind of **Total War** of which **Boyd** spoke. The way I understand his way of being, **total war** is an internalized state of **total** presence and rigor applied to daily life. Fascism makes this rigor uniform and mandatory, turning it into nothing more than an ensnaring religion. I believe in internalized 'warriorism' where we actually put the amount of focus and intensity into our lives that life deserves, not being afraid to apply systems and perceive order, but also recognizing that all things change and that we must change with them. As a friend of a friend said in regards to this: "I love high-polish combat boots, but I despise any system that requires them."

That said, thank you again for considering my question. Questions like that are so necessary at most conferences I've ever been to, but they are rarely answered because they usually require putting oneself out in the open, which can be very contrary to the 'objective' precepts of academia. I enjoy asking them, and you've confirmed my suspicion that all the good speakers do continue to think about such things when asked, even after the conference is over.

Please keep up the good work, and stay in touch if you wish!

Greg

Posted by: Gregory Blouin Souza | April 6, 2005 12:42 PM

seems there's more interest in what some Nazi thinks you look like than in who bill white is he has a listing in wikipedia as an agitator that includes a mug shot i came across him when looking up "third position" ideology that includes gregor strasser, julius evola, alexander dugin, troy southgate, gods of the blood--probably **boyd rice** could be included

in the mix with dagobert's revenge but it does lead to the above blight on the blog
<http://www.infoshop.org/news6/billwhite.php>

Posted by: ozric | April 6, 2005 02:23 PM

Oh wow, so apparently Jodi blocked some third-way celebrity not just a random dumbass. (and thanks for the link ozric)

I think its really ironic that just the other day I talked to her on how i cite has really grown since Jan and now attracts all sorts of different people...

Posted by: George W. | April 6, 2005 02:41 PM

GW--that bit by mullins about comments at infinite thought reminded of the rather evil essay i got to via her whorecull link that they label as academic theory which if you want to read search adolph mcgroot on yahoo for the one on sutcliffe it has anti-capitalism mixed with pure racist misogyny hate rant by the good professor-- not sure it's worth reading but i did anyway.....

Posted by: ozric | April 6, 2005 03:17 PM

Oz, thanks for the link to information on Bill White. Very interesting. I hadn't known anything about this third positionist stuff.

Posted by: Jodi | April 6, 2005 05:02 PM

here's a third position contribution from gregor's bro otto that ziz uses in a paragraph just above the footnotes that includes #3 <http://www.hydrapoetics.com/zizek.html>

Posted by: ozric | April 6, 2005 05:44 PM

Ozric, I honestly don't even know what to think. Or more specifically, I don't know how to pattern my thought on this. I was looking for attacks on race in the same, but by the end I thought that "racist" a qualifier to misogynist may actually be appropriate in this case. Its so extreme that it almost leaves the realm of insult and becomes something "phenomenal", a form of "art" almost, devoid of content, something that you pass on to your friends so that they can too marvel at how disgusting something can be. (as you sorta did just now)

(and btw in my fascist-Zionist high school days I've read a lot of extreme stuff online in supremacist cites, so I am more desensitized to this than most, but you should perhaps post a warning for other readers who simply may not want to get into this, and that essay is "bad" from the very beginning)

Posted by: George W. | April 6, 2005 05:51 PM

You might also considering analyzing black metal, which is not only "Satanic" but "fascist."

<http://www.anus.com/metal>

ANTI-BALLISTIC DEFENSE

Jodi Dean's response to Nazi Blog clogging presented in Tucson Arizona

Blogging Theory

I was thrilled when Charlie Bertsch invited me to participate in this plenary. I was also somewhat freaked out because it wasn't that long ago and I wasn't supposed to present some of my prior work on Zizek or technofetishism, but talk instead about blogging and new media. I wasn't sure what to say about this. I haven't been blogging even six months. So I haven't yet brought together the theoretical work I've been doing for over a decade with my new experiences within the medium. Fortunately or unfortunately, a few weeks ago, after I gave a talk on evil at a conference at MIT, my blog suffered from an incursion of neo-Nazis. A person named Bill White posted a number of anti-Semitic comments. He also remarked on how stupid I am and how badly I dress. He linked my little blog to his libertarian-socialist website, I think called outrage. This encouraged other neo-Nazis to leave comments on my blog, which they did, asking why I was judgmental against racists and instructing me to show my cunt. This blog infestation, Charlie decided, would make a good topic for this plenary. As he said in an email: "what happens when scholars take the step of opening themselves up to attacks which the academy typically walls out? That is, the complex issues raised by being engaged by a fascist in a public setting seem to get at larger questions about risk and responsibility in the cyber public sphere."

I will try to speak to these questions today, but I should add that I am still working through them. I was unsettled by the neo-Nazis. And, I've also been unsettled by those I can't place, those who may be satirical, performative in non-pc ways, and those whose comments are just generally disruptive and malicious. For example, one guy posted from the GNAA—which seems to be an anti-blog group with various satirical elements and strategies for irritating bloggers. GNAA stands for Gay Nigger Association of America and apparently gets its name from a short 1992 Danish movie called *Gay Niggers from Outerspace*, a film that appears to be an actual movie, a porn send up, but I can't be completely sure.

I don't like the idea of blocking people from my blog and deleting their comments. But I also realized that the exchanges I value only occur within limits. Not everyone can or should participate. Exploring the possibility of something beyond democracy or of a democracy not corrupted by its association with Bush, militarization, and global capital is not something I can do—or want to do—together with neo-Nazis. Yet, it is also something that I don't want to do alone, before the disciplinary eye of academic political theory, or under local pressures for a decision. The incursion of the unwanted thus seems to be part of the risk of thinking with others, part of the vulnerability of opening oneself, one's words and one's thoughts, to anyone who might venture upon them.

Of course, there is something massively stupid in my prior overlooking of the necessity of limits and contexts for discussion. Contextualization--emphasis on way the context of a statement or practice provides it with coherence--is a staple of political theory and cultural studies. Stanley Fish makes the argument for context in a particularly powerful way: meaning requires limits, discursive parameters establishing the conditions of truth and falsity, of adequation and appropriateness. An argument or position is

compelling not when it is context-free but due to the prior operation of power in securing the context within which it becomes compelling. What, then, do we do when we are responsible for drawing the lines, setting the limits, that is, when we have to decide on exclusion? How do we bring other values into play, values perhaps associated with transgression, with challenges to normativity, authority, and the hegemonic arrangement of power? Differently put, when one is accustomed to discussion in a critical left, critically informed setting, how does one interact once these assumptions no longer hold, once the discussion is really open, once the audience is really diverse, that is, once it includes those others one finds most other and repellant?

To think about these questions, I approach them indirectly, beginning with some reflection on blogging which I hope to tie back to the question of publics and transgression.

Various media voices have proclaimed each of the last three years the ‘year of the blog’—that is, the year blogs became mainstream, started getting major print and television notice, or had significant political impact. The Pew Internet and American Life Project established that by the end of 2004 27% of internet users were reading blogs, with seven percent having blogs of their own. Nevertheless, some 62% of net users weren’t sure what a blog is. Still, mainstream media accounts cite a number of events as evidence for the rising importance of the blogosphere--first hand reports out of Iraq, Trent Lott’s resignation as Senate majority leader, Howard Dean’s rise and fall, the retirement of Dan Rather, and the story of right-wing faux reporter Jeff Gannon’s access to the White House. Prominent in such articles are breathless references to citizen or participatory journalism, to blogs as alternatives to mass media, on the one hand, and scolding dismissals of narcissistic navel gazing, of mommy diaries and teenage angst, on the other. What should be more prominent is the remarkable use the right makes of blogs, but that’s another story.

At any rate, missing from nearly every account of blogs and blogging is the genre of academic blogs, and its even smaller subset, the theory-minded blog—no doubt because the number of such blogs and their readers is small and their discussions specialized if not downright esoteric—Badiou, Benjamin, Blanchot, Heidegger, Zizek. There are of course a couple of very popular academic bloggers—Glen Reynolds of Instapundit is a law professor and Michael Berube teaches English at Penn State. But both, Reynolds more than Berube, tend more to punditry and political commentary than theory. They don’t blog primarily about their academic work. Their aims, audience, and impact are significantly larger than those of most academic and, more specifically, theory-oriented blogs.

The theory blogs—and I am thinking primarily of about 30 or so interconnected blogs—generally combine personal and theoretical explorations, discussions of culture and politics, reflections on academic practices, and anything that strikes the blogger’s fancy. So, while they share a thread of theoretical concerns, they also differ greatly. The authors might be single or groups. They might or might not allow comments. They might post daily or less than once a week. Their tones and personalities differ. Describing a continuum of theory blogs, the blogger Alphonse von Worden mentions two poles—“Charlotte Street’s Benjaminin Cumean Sibyl thing and I Cite’s salon. ... I Cite has [the air] of a physical place you enter, where someone is offering you tea and debates

are happening and you are really encouraged to contribute” and Charlotte Street suggests something like a Library or Temple, a place for silent reading and contemplation. Yet another theory blogger says, “my blog reminds me of the napkins and matchbooks you pull out of the pockets of your winter coats in April when the dry cleaning pick up is expected.”

These small academic and theory blogs belie a number of assumptions about the internet in general and blogging in particular. And, as they do so, they expose a problem we encounter in cultural studies and critical left theory—a problem regarding a particular celebration of transgression, on the one hand, and a valorization of a notion of publics or counterpublics, on another.

What are some of the assumptions about blogging or networked communications?

1. A first assumption involves speed. The fast pace of networked communication is a prominent meme. Opinions, image, and information are said to circulate rapidly through the blogosphere, like some kind of digital ebola or influenza. For most, this rapidity is a problem, or an excuse. It explains a lack of reflection, the need to respond immediately.

But theory blogs aren’t like this. A discussion on theory blogs might spread over half a dozen or more blogs over the course of weeks, like some kind of long running seminar. So, Charlotte Street posts a reflection on the notion of the call of conscience in Heidegger. I respond with a question about the superego in Lacan and then make a post of my own on interpellation according to Žižek and Althusser. CProbes provides a different reading of Lacan, extending the question in another direction. Rather than a fast paced media sphere, this exchange is like a slow seminar, focusing on one narrow question that arises on its own, and is addressed over a longer period of time, giving those who engage it opportunity to read and reflect.

I should add that the emphasis on speed overlooks a key feature of blogs—they are archives, specific accountings of the passage of time that can then be explored, returned to, dug up. At any rate, my point is that the temporality of theory blogs is not that of action news, of the reflex conditioned to conform to the hegemonic organization of time spans in terms of specific seasons, cliffhangers, or perpetual urgency. Nor is it the same as the temporality of the face-to-face seminar, the pressure to respond immediately in the classroom or academic meeting. Instead, it is a more thoughtful, human time. The time one wants to take and is willing to offer.

2. A second assumption regarding blogs is that all bloggers are wanna be pundits who imagine themselves as talking heads on Cross Fire or some horrid thing on MSNBC or Fox. I think of this as the ‘blogs as alternative media’ assumption. What underlies it are the guiding notions of corporate media, that is, a kind of market model that focuses on bottom lines of hit counts (audience, mind share), links from A-list bloggers, and mentions in the mainstream press. Dan Gillmor seems to have something like this in mind in his book *We the Media*. And, in fact, it also appears in a number of other books on blogging and articles on how to blog.

Two contradictory problems with this model of blogging come to the fore when one thinks of theory blogs. The first is the assumption that the best writing gets the most attention. The second is the assumption that the most extreme views sell. (Part of the popularity of this second view rests on rather gothic assumptions regarding the Internet as

a virtual bedlam of ranting maniacs.) Now, unless one presumes that the best writing is the most extreme writing, these ideas rub up against each other in uncomfortable ways. Why should anyone think that what rises to the top of the blog indexes, what circulates the most or gets the most trackbacks, is the best? That's like saying that *The Purpose Driven Life* is a better book than *Gender Trouble* because it sold more copies. At any rate, the presence of theory blogs and the practice of theorizing on blogs opens us up to interesting and thoughtful writing that aims neither toward popularity nor extremism. Here is a small sample from the blog Spurious:

With, not alone – to write as you travel is not to travel alone. And to read as you shelter is to know that there are others who travel ahead of you, a long way ahead, perhaps, but traveling nonetheless. But in the end, to read, to write, is not to enjoy reciprocity or exchange. Words always come from afar, from the other side of the day or the night, which is to say, unexpectedly.

3. A third assumption is that blogging is necessarily self-indulgent or narcissistic. This assumption proceeds as if the blogger thinks she is presenting information for all the world, as if her life is intrinsically interesting to everyone. Like the presumption of punditry, this one relies on old, corporate media assumptions, we could even say public sphere assumptions that when one speaks in a mediated environment one is specifically addressing an audience of everyone. But this applies neither to theory blogs nor to any of the personal, life-oriented blogs, I've read.

Bloggers know fully well that we may have no readers, a few readers, or hundreds or thousands of readers—we can keep track of hits and visitors. What is more unsettling, and what makes blogging a kind of experiment in voice and presentation is that we don't know who will find us. We could reveal all and no one would know. Or, we could reveal something mundane, something everyday like an anxiety about our lovers or children or a dismissive remark about a colleague or another academic, and have it a topic of conversation among colleagues or friends of colleagues. And, we might not even know. So, bloggers don't try to reach the world. Some of us try to reach to others who might share our concerns and perhaps in reaching them to reach another part of ourselves. Here are some examples:

K-punk:

Why I started the blog? Because it seemed like a space - the only space - in which to maintain a kind of discourse that had started in the music press and the art schools, but which had all but died out, with what I think are appalling cultural and political consequences. My interest in theory was almost entirely inspired by writers like Ian Penman and Simon, so there has always been an intense connection between theory and pop/ film for me. No sob stories, but for someone from my background it's difficult to see where else that interest would have come from. Because of that, my relation to the academy has always been uh difficult. The way in which I understood theory - primarily through popular culture - is generally detested in universities. Most dealings with the academy have been literally - clinically - depressing.

D o r o t h e a S a l o (H Y P E R L I N K
"http://cavlec.yarinareth.net/archives/2002/09/#e000929"
http://cavlec.yarinareth.net/archives/2002/09/#e000929 ; Caveat Lector):

Some people speak about themselves and their families in clichés and polite fictions for many of the same reasons corporations speak in empty, sonorous PR, not least among them desperate fear of the truth. Some people, submerged in the family fictions, lose their real voices in part or wholly. Blogging threatens such families for the same reasons it threatens PR-dependent corporations. It threatens the fiction, the public façade of perfection, the private walls around anger and pain and disagreement and error. The “public” nature of blogging is only an excuse, really, for those who want the façades maintained. Public or private is not the issue; the issue is talking truthfully, or writing truthfully, at all. To anyone.

Kim Nicolini (for *Bad Subjects*):

...my blog is a project, and I am very conscious of how I use it, the stories I choose to tell, the voice I choose to use, the performance I am giving in this public arena. Through my blog, my art, my history, and my writing are no longer compartmentalized. I have been able to create a new self-portrait, one of my whole self, not fractured crippled bits. I mix stories of my past with pictures of my present, poetry and politics, humor and sadness, film and fashion. All of me with no shame, no censorship. And I build a rhythm into it, moving back and forth through form and sound and image. It’s a big collage of the me I have been assembling all these years. And it is a me who I like.

To return to my point: theory blogging, as and with personal blogging, involves a kind of experiment in writing, in writing with others one may not know, in working through a sense of self through presentation. To be sure, the self that emerges, may not be the one that the author intends. Combinations of posts, over time, can produce the sense of a self that one might not have expected or designed. In a comment on my blog, Chris Robinson described blogging as “a kind of two-way voyeurism. I see into the lived life of others; and, in response, I reveal and surprise myself.”

For me, the work of theory is then an experiment in thinking with others, in putting out ideas as they emerge, before they are tamed and groomed and made presentable for an academic audience. To return to the words of Spurious—it’s a way to try to experience how words come from afar, unexpectedly.

I’ve been arguing that theory blogs belie three assumptions about blogging in particular and networked communications in general, assumptions about speed, punditry, and self-indulgence. In contrast, my experience with blogs is that they allow for slower reflection, the emergence of spaces of affinity through specialized writing, and the experience of a presentation and cultivation of a self. And these three attributes of blogs—reflection, affinity, self-cultivation—necessarily traverse the old liberal division of the world into public and private spheres. This division does nothing to explain or express blog patterns. Most bloggers are not speaking to some kind of infinitely large audience that could mistakenly be deemed a public. Rather, they are speaking to strangers, to ones they do not and may not ever know.

Reflection, affinity, and self-cultivation, whether done in direct conversation with others via the comments feature, or less directly via responses to other blogs that one

writes in one's own way, on one's own blog, are necessarily exclusive. This is obviously true when we recall the issues of language and access to technology. It is also true when we think of the topics and terminologies, the terms of art with which one thinks, the contexts to which Fish draws our attention. And, it is true when we recognize that one does not have time to read everything, respond to everything, link to everything, explain everything, to debate every single point. To offer one's thoughts, one's reflections on one's life, then, is not enter into a discussion forum where one expects to have to defend every utterance or event from attack, to give reasons for everything one thinks or does. At the same time, it is also not to expect simple acquiescence, agreement, or praise from one who might happen on one's post and decide to comment. The writing, the thinking, is rather different—more an exposure, invitation, or gift, an offering of one's vulnerabilities in the hope that the one who accepts the offer will not simply respond, but will be responsive.

There is an openness, a door that a stranger might open, a link on which an other one does not know can click. On a blog, one is not protected by prestige, institutional affiliation, title, or expertise. You have to give these up. In feminist circles, giving up authority has sometimes been considered a goal of collaborative learning, an ideal of an egalitarian classroom. A similar move in anthropology has been to reverse the terms of power, to stop treating the object of study as an object and to disrupt the hierarchical arrangements which privilege the perspective of the observer. Challenging institutional and disciplinary privilege is thus for some academics a vital, even emancipatory practice.

Disrupting academic privilege is also a practice often articulated with a notion of transgression, the transgression of dominant norms and expectations. One uses shock to try to open up thinking to something new. But there are problems here. When we try to undermine our position and expertise, we risk validating it in another way—we are presuming that our authority is there, reinforcing it, not really risking it at all. Indeed, there is something massively condescending with the whole academic celebration of transgression: in establishing the terms of transgression in advance, we validate precisely what we claim we want to contest. We establish that there is a sphere, perhaps a public sphere, in which one is authorized to speak, in which one has a kind of authority and in which expectations of reason and respect govern the terms of discussion. My view is that this notion of transgression relies on the fantasy of an authority that does not exist, indeed, that it embodies an awareness of the fragility of that authority and thus aims ultimately to reinforce it, to affirm it, by addressing it.

In blogging, the terms of transgression are not given in advance. I can write numerous posts about the fascist truth of the Bush administration or the perverse notion of women underlying the Terry Schiavo brouhaha, but this speech is of course permitted. It doesn't agree with the current hegemony, but it is certainly allowed within it. It doesn't transgress a thing. And, it is itself called into question, contested, undermined, by comments like the following, from Bill White, the neo-Nazi or libertarian socialist I mentioned at the beginning. In a post on my blog I Cite, which I removed but saved, White writes:

You live in an environment where debate is not free, and your half-witted ideas are protected and allowed an existence that exposure to reason would not accord them. ...

You imply here that you are being criticized because you criticized Bush. No. You are being criticized because you sounded *stupid* while criticizing Bush. Understand that it is not criticism of Bush, but your particular criticism of Bush, that led to the reference to you as "Buffy the Bush Slayer". ... God, what do you think of the world? Do you think there are some politically correct blog police that are going to stop people from criticizing you, like they do at your university? In the United States there is a First Amendment, and just like the First Amendment allows you to prattle on like a moron with vapid ideas that no real person takes seriously, it allows people to point out that your ideas are vapid and you're prattling on like a moron. Not everyone has to be nice to you; not everyone has to agree to you; and your extreme pathological reaction to criticism is disturbing. You are not fully developed psychologically, and I strongly recommend you quit your job and go out into the real world to toughen up a bit, because if you can't debate a few easy criticisms, at some point, the real world will eat you. Even the moron claiming I'm a racist slumlord is doing better than you.

I've never addressed White directly in response. In part, I don't know what to say. It's as if his remarks shatter the presumptions and expectations that enable me to speak, exposing their specificity, their fragility, and their context dependency. I also don't engage him because of a more general guideline I follow in not debating racist and anti-Semitic positions. I don't want to participate in enabling such hate to be within the parameters of the permissible. But White's incursion, I should probably say participation, because unwanted, because a transgression disrupting and unsettling my expectations is valuable insofar as it challenges me to take responsibility for the specificity of my practices and assumptions. I can't pretend to be inclusive, to respect all others. There are others I want to exclude, who I cannot and will not engage. Conservatives are not the only ones who draw a line in the sand or seek to install and defend standards of permissibility. A true transgression, one that is not staged but comes unwanted, from afar, is thus a calling to account. The risk of an encounter with the unwanted and the call to take responsibility for not inviting them in, for excluding them, is thus the opening blogs provide, an opening critical left cultural studies might embrace.

RESTRAINT

On April 9th, 2005 I was invited to do an interview for National Public Radio and discuss the success of the summit Regarding Evil. I spoke to the many aspects of the conference including highlights of Ron Jones' talk, Jodi Dean's encounter with Nazi sympathizers, Boyd Rice's performance and my intellectual aspirations with the subject. What ended up on the show *Weekend America* was focused specifically on the Manson letters. After my initial upset over this editing trick, I was later pleased with the national visibility the project received and the influx of emails praising my refusal to read the letters on the air. I have included one example below.

On Apr 9, 2005, at 4:53 PM, E wrote:

Dear Mr. Cisneros,

I just heard you interviewed on the radio and was delighted by your refusal to read a Manson note as requested by the interviewer. DELIGHTED! Media persons have no understanding nor appreciation of context. Anything goes. I appreciate your sense of the importance of context and wish you well in your creative effort and your life.

Sincerely,

Ed Land
(Olympia Washington)

Ed,

Thank you for being in support of my position. In fact, the more interesting things that came out of the summit were not mentioned....they're somewhere on the editing floor. I guess I was naive... I took the bait and all they really wanted was Manson spectacle. Thanks for the note!

Best.

Ross

LEAD-IN

Coming up on Weekend America....

The power of relics- whether it's kissing the Pope's ring or holding a letter from Charles Manson. We consider today, touching Good and touching Evil. I'm Barbara Bogaev., *and I'm Bill Radke*

BILL

.....and its not just holy relics and symbols of things we think are good, we are also fascinated by artifacts of Evil. And that's what came out last week in a symposium called Regarding Evil it was held at MIT. 400 hundred people were there, artists, academics, and Satan worshipers, and they had gather to consider the meaning and the significance of Evil- and the stars of the conference were two short handwritten notes from Charles Manson. I talked to the organizer an MIT grad student Ross Cisneros and he told he that he started writing to Manson in prison as a way of exploring the power Manson still has to horrify us.

ROSS

When I would come across his image or his name, my behavior would change. He still has this enduring symbolic power that can eclipse all other current events that may be more horrific than the murders that happed in California. And in that way Charlie Manson had control over my emotional response. So, my hope that in getting this out of the way, establishing this communication, I would exorcise that ghost or get rid of that infection.

BILL

So what was it like to when you actually received these letters from Charles Manson, was there something important in holding these in your hand?

ROSS

Well, they were important for maybe about an hour- but honestly I have gotten over him along time ago- but what may be important for others new to the letters may have something to do with body oil. What I mean by that is you have a physical object, you have the letter itself, and you can imagine the palm of the author sliding over the page and leave something behind- some trace of the real thing. In this way, these objects have a particular aura for some people.

BILL

Will you read one of these letters to us?

ROSS

No I won't

BILL

Why not?

ROSS

Well I won't because our communication had a time and place, and this time and place was at the summit at MIT. And I feel that if I re-read these letters, I am re-establishing a relationship that I have deemed over. It is my hope that the sensationalism Charlie Manson carries lasted the hour that we spent on it at the summit.

BILL

You emailed me a copy of those letters, they are very short notes, and it seemed like babbling to me- something about the Titanic then it disintegrating into "Chim-baling-baling" just nonsense.

ROSS

Right... after reading these letters aloud to the audience, mostly I got chuckles because of the incoherent language of the letters- and so I felt we brought attention to the banality of Charlie Manson and was able to identify him as a *criminal* rather than a transcendental Devil.

BILL

So what did Charles Manson tell you about Evil?

ROSS

I just felt that the spectacle that orbits around Charlie Manson was not so useful and often misguided people in understanding the true nature of the Good, the Bad, and if it exists, transcendental Evil. In this way, I was hoping to lift the fog and not be lost in the opacity of these inconceivable terms- and beyond that it might be useful to just get over it because there are certainly a lot more to be concerned about and worried about- and a great many other reasons to feel a sense of withdraw at the utterance of a name or an event.

BILL

Ross this has been really interesting, thanks very much.

ROSS

Thank you.

BILL *lead-out*

Ross Cisneros is an artist and a graduate student at MIT's School of Architecture. After the break, Touching Goodness we'll have a conversation about the long religious tradition of relics.

MONOGRAPHS

ROSS CISNEROS

Ross Cisneros, artist and composer, was raised in Southern California and Cocoa Beach Florida before moving to New York City. He received his BFA from The Cooper Union School of Art and completed thesis work Regarding Evil for his S.M.Vis.S from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. While studying at MIT, Cisneros sought the tutelage of theologians and studied hermeneutics at the Harvard Divinity School. Having been influenced by the discipline of preaching and the discourse of sacred things, Cisneros began to explore the evocative nature of art and its close association with liturgical practice, ministerial duty, and the inherent responsibility for evangelical distribution of mystic truths. Cisneros has exhibited in numerous group shows in New York and London often resulting in the melding of sculptural, cinematic, and performative hallucinations. As a writer of critical essays, odes, and sermons, Cisneros has begun editing a book project co-authored by Garrett Ricciardi on *The Cool: An Aesthetic of Dissensus* following his performance at Artists Space *This Machine Kills*. Cisneros recently contributed to MIT's critical journal of visual culture *Thresholds* with his essay *Courting Eden, Purging Rome* as well as forthcoming publications from *K48* magazine, *Numero* magazine Portugal and *Topic* magazine. His multi-media installation for *Can I Get a Witness* at the Longwood Arts Center, gained the attention of the New York Times in a feature article by Holland Cotter. Ross works between New York City and his biodynamic farm in New England.

JULIAN LAVERDIERE

Julian LaVerdiere was born in 1971 and raised in New York City. He earned a BFA from The Cooper Union in New York and a MFA in sculpture from Yale University. He is a founding member of the production-design collective BigRoom LLC, which has received international acclaim for its innovative approach to commercial production design.

In 1999, LaVerdiere had his first New York solo exhibition at Andrew Kreps Gallery. He has since had solo shows at No-Limits Gallery in Milan, Italy, Ever-Green Gallery in Geneva, Switzerland and the Lehman Maupin Gallery in New York, and has participated in numerous group exhibitions in the United States and Europe. In 2000, his work was prominently featured in *Greater New York*, an exhibition at PS1-Moma, Long Island City, New York. In the same year, while developing *Bioluminescent Beacon* (a public art project with Creative Time), he was granted studio residencies at both the American Museum of Natural History and the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council Studio Program on the 91st floor of the North Tower of the World Trade Center.

In 2001 and 2002, LaVerdiere worked with fellow-artist Paul Myoda, three architects, Creative Time and the Municipal Arts Society to create “*Tribute in Light*,” the temporary light memorial to the victims of September 11th, 2001. This public artwork has subsequently been selected to become an annual addition to the WTC Memorial.

In 2003, LaVerdiere had his first solo museum exhibitions at the Museums of Contemporary Art in Miami and Cleveland and his work is included in the permanent collections of PS1-Moma, New York, MOCA, Miami, Museu Nacional de Historia Natural, Portugal and the Library of Congress, DC as well as a number of major private collections.

LaVerdiere has received awards and grants for both individual and public art collaborations. In 2000, LaVerdiere and Creative Time received a *National Endowment for the Arts* grant and a *Warhol Foundation* grant for the *Bioluminescent Beacon*. In 2002, he received the first Annual Cooper Union Urban Visionaries Award. In 2003, he and his fellow *Tribute in Light* collaborators received the *Brendan Gill Prize* from the Municipal Arts Society. In 2004, he received a NYC *Percent for Art* grant to make a piece for FDNY Engine Company #277, which is to be installed in 2006.

Employing a pastiche of symbols, signs and themes from the past and the present, LaVerdiere draws attention to pivotal moments and events that serve as historic harbingers of coming change and paradigm shifts.

LaVerdiere lives and works in New York City and is represented by Lehmann Maupin Gallery.

JODI DEAN

Jodi Dean teaches political theory at Hobart and William Smith Colleges where she chairs the Department of Political Science. She is on the steering committee for the Social Science Research Council's Program on Information Technology and International Cooperation and is co-editing (with Geert Lovink and Jon Anderson a book presenting the project's outcomes). Her books include: *Solidarity of Strangers* (U of Cal Press, 1996), *Aliens in America* (Cornell UP, 1998--chosen as one of the Village Voice's Best Books of the Year), and *Publicity's Secret: How Technoculture Capitalizes on Democracy* (Cornell UP 2002). She serves on the editorial board of the journal *Theory and Event* and has edited symposia on new technologies for the journals *Constellations* and *Signs* as well as the books *Feminism and the New Democracy* (Sage 1997) and *Cultural Studies and Political Theory* (Cornell UP 2000). With Paul A. Passavant, she edited *Empire's New Clothes: Reading Hardt and Negri* (Routledge 2004). She is currently writing a book on the political theory of Slavoj Žižek to be published by Routledge.

RONALD JONES

Ronald Jones, an artist and critic, is Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies at Konstfack, University College of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm, Sweden, and is on the Visiting Faculty at the Staatliche Hochschule für Bildende Künste, Städelschule Frankfurt, Germany, and the The School of Architecture at the Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm. Before taking these appointments, he served as the first Provost at Art Center College of Design where he guided the design and implementation of a new transdisciplinary curriculum for the College. He came to Art Center from Columbia University, where he was Professor of Visual Arts in the School of the Arts, and Co-Director of the Interactive Design Lab. Before joining the faculty at Columbia, Jones was Senior Critic at the School of Art, Yale University for nine years. He has also served on the faculty of The Royal Danish Academy of Art, Copenhagen, The Rhode Island School of Design, The School of Visual Arts, New York, among others.

Jones is represented by Metro Pictures and the Sonnabend Gallery in New York. He is a principle at o-b-o-k (ord, bilder, objekt and kunskap), an office for experience design he formed with Laurie Haycock Makela. o-b-o-k provides cross-discipline research, creative development, and experience design through the integration of writing, art, design, and history.

He holds a Certificate from the Harvard University Graduate School of Education, took the MFA degree from the University of South Carolina, and the Ph.D. in art history from Ohio University. He has delivered over two hundred lectures at universities, museums, and art and design schools including Harvard University, The Art Institute of Chicago, Yale University, The Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, The Whitney Museum of American Art, The Guggenheim Museum, The Rhode Island School of Design, Parsons School of Design, DIA Center for the Arts, New York City, Royal College of Art, London, Carnegie Mellon University, Brown University, Akademie Der Bildenden Künste, Vienna, the Architectural Association, London, among others.

Jones contributes regularly to *Art Forum* and *frieze* and writes frequently on contemporary art for various publications including *Art in America*, *Parkett*, *Zone*, *Flash Art*. He is the author of numerous museum and exhibition catalogs most recently having written on David Salle, Elizabeth Peyton, Terry Winters, and Willem de Kooning.

A practicing artist Jones has exhibited internationally including solo exhibitions in New York, Berlin, Tokyo, Los Angeles, Paris, and Cologne. Recent projects include garden designs in Munster (for the Munster Sculpture Project) and “Aussendist,” a garden complex for the city of Hamburg, both in Germany. His work is in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Guggenheim Museum, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and the Moderna Museet, Stockholm, among others.

His first opera “Falling and Waving” was produced by the Brooklyn Academy of Music and Arts at Saint Ann’s in New York City in 1999. He is at work on a second opera titled “Moon Shot.”

Dr. Jones has received numerous awards, including the National Endowment for the Arts Visual Arts Fellowship, and a Mellon Grant. In addition, he was a member of the Executive Committee of the Lucent Project at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and sits on the boards of numerous cultural organizations including the Public Art Fund, and Artists Space.

BOYD RICE

Boyd Rice, recording artist, performer, and author, was appointed Priest in the Church of Satan by the late Anton LaVey, a frequent visitor of Charles Manson, and friend/inspiration for the young Marilyn Manson. As a pioneer of noise music in the late 60s and 70s, Boyd has been known to uproot the status quo with radical and often uncomfortable propositions that has led to numerous debates with the religious right, and earned a reputation as a social demiurge. Boyd will present a chronology of counter-cultural activity and speak of his relationship with radical evil.

Quoting from a press release from Boyd's record label Mute Records, he is described as a "Chameleon par excellence, his various paradoxical incarnations include multi-media prankster and legit actor, Gnostic philosopher and camp culture aficionado, uncompromising Social Darwinist and louche martini-sipping raconteur, Satanist spokesman and self-proclaimed descendant of the bloodline of Jesus Christ. Boyd Rice is probably one of the only men alive to be on first name terms with both Marilyn Manson and Charles Manson."

MATTHEW BARNEY

Matthew Barney was born in San Francisco in 1967 and was raised in Boise, Idaho. He attended Yale University, receiving his BA in 1989, then moved to New York City, where he lives today. From his earliest work, Barney has explored the transcendence of physical limitations in a multimedia art practice that includes feature-length films, video installations, sculpture, photography, and drawing. In his first solo exhibitions, Barney presented elaborate sculptural installations that included videos of himself interacting with various constructed objects and performing physical feats such as climbing across the gallery ceiling suspended from titanium ice screws. In 1992, Barney introduced fantastical creatures into his work, a gesture that presaged the vocabulary of his subsequent narrative films. In 1994, Barney began work on his epic Cremaster cycle, a five-part film project accompanied by related sculptures, photographs, and drawings. He completed the cycle in 2002. *Matthew Barney: The Cremaster Cycle*, an exhibition organized by the Guggenheim Museum of artwork from the entire project, premiered at the Museum Ludwig, Cologne, in June 2002 and subsequently traveled to the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in October 2002 before its presentation in New York.

CORRESPONDENCE

Date: November 4, 2004 12:45:34 AM EST

To: dr.jones@o-b-o-k.com

Doctor Jones,

My name is Ross Cisneros and I am responsible for organizing MIT's first lecture series regarding the problems of EVIL. I was delighted to receive cc's of your correspondence with Nathan Carter that showed your interest in the matter.

This message is to formally invite you to this event at MIT for the Spring term. At this early point in the planning stages, there is flexibility as to the specific date and time that fits your schedule.

I will now briefly outline the format and usefulness of this lecture series regarding EVIL.

As is known, the problem of evil has found itself at the center of most theological, political, epistemological, and creative inquiry throughout cultural history. However, modernity began to pack an arsenal of unprecedented horrors into the 20th century that would alter the scale and understanding of evil for us in the present as well as create new spaces where evil might be investigated. These new habitats may be within architecture, urban planning, software, media, technocracy, social control, banality etc.,

The contemporary use of the term 'evil' in religiously charged political rhetoric further complicates how we understand this most fickle subject and places the lecture series in a time specific framework.

Remarks from artists, scholars, and theologians will shape a diverse interpretive analysis on the state of evil, hybrids (i.e. Milton's Satan and Holocaust), the possibility that evil does not exist, and the relationship each presenter has with evil within their own practice.

Other presenters invited include:

Peter Gomes: Professor of Christian Morals- Harvard Divinity School

Anthony Vidler: Architect and scholar

Boyd Rice: Counter-cultural demiurge and close friend of the late Anton LaVey

Julian LaVerdiere- Artist
David F. Noble- author and theorist of technology
Leila Ahmed- Professor of Islamic studies- Harvard Divinity School

A transcription of the lectures will be compiled in book form with assisting images and be evaluated for publication.

Please contact me with any questions regarding this matter . If you are still interested in this event, a formal invitation from MIT and the Department of Architecture will be sent to you. An honorarium for your participation as well as transportation and lodging has been considered in the budget. I welcome any specific requirements (monetary or otherwise) for consideration in hopes to make your experience the best it can be.

Thank you again for your interest.

Best,

Ross Cisneros

--

Ross Cisneros
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Visual Studies N-52
Studio 2

From: dr.jones@o-b-o-k.com

Dear Ross: Thanks for your note; I very much look forward to this conference. I will have to look at my spring travel schedule; I know that I am traveling a good bit, but only in Europe and Asia. Because those trips have consumed my schedule, I have had to decline (I made an exception of your invitation) trips to the east coast until the fall of 05. I am only home for the next few days before heading off to Israel and Gaza, and will be back November 29th. If you do not hear from me prior to leaving for the Middle East, let me apologize, but also assure you that you can expect to hear from me with a suggestion for a time to speak on my return. And, by the way, will all the speakers convene at one time, or will these be individual lectures? Again, thanks you so very much for the invitation, I do indeed look forward to it, best, r

Ronald Jones
o-b-o-k
ord bilder objekt kunskap
words pictures objects knowledge

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113 31 Stockholm, Sweden
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www.o-b-o-k.com

From: JDEAN@hws.edu
Subject: RE: Invitation: Evil Summit at MIT
Date: December 7, 2004 8:55:46 PM EST
To: indie@mit.edu

Evil at MIT sounds interesting.

I'd be really interested in attending. I have a long paper on evil forthcoming in Theory and Event. If you want a copy of that, I can send it to you. Anyway, I'd like to hear more about your summit.

Jodi

Subject: Invitation: Evil Summit at MIT

Jodi,

I don't expect a reply immediately as I understand you are doing an event at Location One- I am in the middle of a big project so I must be brief- however, more detailed information will be forthcoming.

I have organized a summit regarding the problems of evil at MIT and the Department of Architecture scheduled for the Spring. I have received several enthusiastic suggestions from different sources to have you as a speaker for this event- and after familiarizing myself with your concerns, I find your work most fitting and I would be honored to have you as our guest. Your theorization of political evil and close read of Negri+Hardt would be of particular interest-

Please consider this. If this is of interest to you, I will introduce the project to you formally and take it from there. It will be an exciting and useful event.

Best,
Ross Cisneros
indie@mit.edu

From: rosalie@gladstonegallery.com
Subject: Matthew Barney / Regarding Evil
Date: January 9, 2005 3:27:53 PM EST
To: indie@MIT.EDU

Dear Ross,

I hope this finds you well.

I am writing on behalf of Matthew Barney in response to your invitation to him to participate in the Regarding Evil summit this spring. As you know from Alex, Matthew finds the summit very interesting and appreciates your invitation. Unfortunately, he will not be able to attend due to his tight deadline to complete his new film and prepare for a museum exhibition that opens in Japan in June. However, Matthew wondered if you would like to screen his most recent film De Lama Lamina, which he made in February 2004 in Brazil during Carnival. The film is on 35mm and is about 50 minutes in duration. I can get exact technical specifications to you soon. We normally charge a screening fee for Matthew's films, which we do not make a profit on at all; the screening fee is merely used to help us cover the costs of making and maintaining new prints of the film. I don't yet know what the fee would be for De Lama Lamina since I first need to know the cost of making a new print, but the fee we charge for Cremaster 1 which is about the same length is -----, to give you an idea. Please let me know if you could be interesting in screening this film?

Very best regards,

Rosalie Benitez

--

Rosalie Benitez, Director
Gladstone Gallery
515 West 24th Street
New York, NY 10011

From: Ross Cisneros <indie@MIT.EDU>
Date: Wed, 29 Dec 2004 14:11:59 -0500
To: ALEX.LEE@MATTHEWBARNEY.COM
Subject: EVIL

(I sent this to Gladstone as well...)

Dear Alex,

I was pleased to hear of Mathew,s interest in being a participant of MIT,s Summit Regarding Evil in the spring of 2005. As per our conversation, the summit was designed to attract people from different disciplines to comment on the problems of evil as it relates to their practice and/or particular artistic idiom. This will be a one-day event in Cambridge, MA. All participants are encouraged to address the topic of evil in any form they so choose. As in Matthew,s case, I understand he suggested screening one of his films. This solution would be perfectly acceptable and desired. We could also speak more at length into other possible forms of presentation sans corps if this were his preferred format as well as framing the work in the context of evil. My motivations for inviting Matthew to this event were rooted (uprooted) by the familiar trope of evil found within the beautiful, in operatic vision, the role and ego of the artist, and the ancient self. My role in organizing this event is not to curate or theorize work. I have simply ushered in relevant presentations and will allow them to operate by themselves, for themselves, and fully consider the modus operandi of each presenter. Each presenter will have the option of submitting a manuscript, images, or the release of the transcribed presentation for publication. No presenter is obligated to be involved in the publication.

The Summit is scheduled for late March or early April depending on flight itineraries of other presenters. Please email me with your questions/comments so that I may begin preparations. Thank you again for your interest.

(ALEX- The fund for this event can allocate ----- as an honorarium for Matthew. However, I am always looking for more funding opportunities and more money could trickle in. I apologize for being vague about this last we spoke- I Just hoped I could offer more and at the time I had little. Anyway this is for scholarship's sake right?) p.s. "please say hello to Alex." -Ron Jones

Best,

Ross

XXX.XXX.XXXX (private residence)

On Feb 7, 2005, at 11:45 AM, Ross Cisneros wrote:

After much time dealing with the schedule office error (April 2/3 mix-up)- I was able to get the final and correct date of April 3rd- Sunday (after church).

Being that the summit will still fall on the same weekend, I hope that this does not present any problems.

To ensure everything is easy for everyone, I would ask that each of you let me know when you would like to arrive and how. I need to make travel arrangements and hotel reservations.

The summit will operate on a schedule of various presentations/screenings. To allow everyone the appropriate time to present, I would like to know approximately how long each presentation will be.

I am thinking that up to 45 minutes would fit well in the schedule.

*** a note on available technology.

The lecture hall seats 500 people and is equipt with 3 video projectors (left,center,right) and a 35mm projector. Computer connections are available with internet access. If you require a slide projector, please advise.

All Best,

Ross

--

Ross Cisneros
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Visual Studies N-52
Studio 2

FROM BOYD RICE

R--- i think i once told you of my notion that Lucifer was a woman, that most every culture had a divine couple, & that with the coming of patriarchy gods female consort was (over & over again) converted into a male demon. with Judaism's el & asherat, she became the male demon astaroth. Venus was the morning star, so was Lucifer. Lucifer was the most beautiful of the angels & the most beloved of god, sitting at his right hand. the qualities that define Lucifer are lust, pride, and temptation--- all qualities associated with the feminine. i have a very well defined theory about all this, & somewhere around here extensive notes for an essay i was writing about the idea. it would be a great topic for a lecture, but with preparing for a tour, completing an album, & getting ready for a photo exhibit in Rome, i doubt i'd have the time to seriously pursue it on the level it deserves. a damn shame, because i do feel the sacred feminine has been submerged in many cultures conceptions of "evil". excuse me if i'm less than articulate just now, i've had a day from hell & have had more than a few cocktails. no word from lisa yet, but i may sign off & try again now. all my best to you, boyd

From: ronald.jones@konstfack.se
Subject: RE: EVIL: MIT
Date: February 8, 2005 8:53:54 AM EST
To: indie@mit.edu
Reply-To: ronald.jones@konstfack.se

Ross: Thanks for your note. I would be delighted to give a mini-seminar, and do studio visits as you wish. My only constraint is that I must be in Frankfurt on Friday April 8th, meaning that I would need to be back in Stockholm at the latest the morning of the 7th. So according to how many classes I would be working with, I could do two seminars, say on Monday and Tuesday morning, and studio visits one of those afternoons? If you want more, I could do more.

I have two fresh lectures that I have been giving recently; one on the ethics of curating and building exhibitions centered on the exhibition of Abu Ghraib photographs at ICP, and the other titled "Next to Torture Art Persuades Most" which is on the current brimming power of knowledge and information, and why the art world seems to be left behind. You could tell me what kinds of subjects would work best for your crowd, and we could go from there.

I am happy to come into Logan, but I would like to get to New York for two days. Could I fly in on the 30th or 31st, take the train down and come back? And by the by, when you refer to the "summit" do you mean our thing or are we a part of a larger event? That is, are there things going on the weekend related to our presentations? Looking forward, best, r

-----Original Message-----

From: Ross Cisneros [mailto:indie@MIT.EDU]

Sent: Monday, February 07, 2005 7:21 PM

To: dr.jones@o-b-o-k.com

Subject: Evil...etc

I only mentioned this to Julian so far.... I made contact with Charlie Manson and wanted to incorporate him in some way.

Do you have a question for him or thoughts in general? You see, in many ways he is irrelevant and hard to read- in others, his "ghost" is still powerful and is reflective.

I am open to suggestions.

please, "Con Clave"

-----ROSS

From: ronald.jones@konstfack.se

Subject: RE: Evil...etc

Date: February 8, 2005 8:56:06 AM EST

To: indie@MIT.EDU

Reply-To: ronald.jones@konstfack.se

WoW. Let me think about this one. Did you get the Times article I sent? Maybe ask him to take the test? I'll get back to you. I am off to Oxford for some lectures and traveling without computer. You will hear from me next on Sunday with some Charlie suggestions, best, r

Ronald Jones

o-b-o-k

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Will send you some things and even images. I am preparing a lecture commissioned by the Swedish Royal Academy of the Arts on EVIL Architecture some of which I may bring to MIT. Stay tuned, best, r

Ronald Jones

From: ronald.jones@konstfack.se
Subject: RE: Regarding Evil//clues
Date: February 24, 2005 3:31:04 AM EST
To: indie@mit.edu
Reply-To: ronald.jones@konstfack.se

Ross: Hope things are well; yes I did see the piece on the Vatican education in evil. I am wondering if we can set some dates for coming and going. I remember that our get together is on the 3rd? And I understand there might be some other seminars or lectures I might do while there. I did not know if I had to stay a week to get a reasonable fare. I could of course come before the "event" to give a lecture or seminar, or do them afterwards, but I must be in Frankfurt on Thursday the seventh of April to lecture, and then I am off to Kosovo for a week of teaching. It is an interesting adventure, a number of us - like Doctors with Borders - are Professors without borders, and are parachuting into Kosovo to "set-up" an art school. It seems the time is now. In any event, I need to get to Cambridge and back to Stockholm I suppose so that these tickets do not become complicated by my flying Cambridge to Frankfurt on the return. You see what I mean, well what's best from your end? Looking forward, best, r

Ronald Jones
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-----Original Message-----

From: Ross Cisneros [mailto:indie@MIT.EDU]
Sent: Friday, February 18, 2005 5:33 PM
To: Ronald Jones
Subject: Re: Regarding Evil//clues

YES. ARCHITECTURE.

I was hoping to fill that space within the context--- Virilio, Vidler's 'uncanny', Moses, etc... I will be sending a package to Manson soon- I welcome your contributions.
....a side note--- it seems the Devil is very much alive in the eyes of the Vatican these days...in the news.

Best,

Ross

From: americathevideo@yahoo.com
Subject: Regarding Evil event
Date: March 16, 2005 10:00:24 PM EST
To: regardingevil-www@mit.edu

Will this event be open to the public or just students of MIT? I've tried searching the website but am coming up empty handed for information. If the event is open to the public, how does one get in, are there tickets available or is it a 'whoever shows up is welcome' kind of thing?

Any information you have will be appreciated.

-david m. lemoine

"There may be flies on you and me, but there are no flies on Jesus."
- Hunter S. Thompson

Fear is a token
And, in this darkness
It never rests
My hope and it's Angels
Our death and our deeds
- Death In June: Hail! The White Grain

From: lberrios@MIT.EDU
Subject: Re: EVIL//MIT//April 3
Date: March 17, 2005 12:18:27 PM EST
To: indie@mit.edu

ooooooooooooooooooooo...

como diría mi compadre brasileiro - isse negocio ta legal pra-ca-ra-lho!

super interesante cabrón!

yo estoy dando una charlita en una conferencia de política en Puerto Rico (thus the wording) en un recinto pequeño de la universidad nacional que habla de lo que KW ha estado hablando y creo que también un poquito de tu tema:

La “Mediocracia”

La reciente radicalización en los ámbitos políticos mantiene una simetría que efectivamente neutraliza las ecologías democráticas. Esta cancelación es representada a través de la falacia del consenso, donde se disuelve la naturaleza de la política. Esta cancelación, ejecutada por agendas similarmente sospechosas, ha fomentado lo moral como la “narrativa maestra” que no permite la disensión pública ya que la opinión que se percibe como la oposición es calificada como “diabólica.” El reestablecimiento del campo de confrontación discursiva procura un régimen de acciones provisionales que, en vez de lanzar un rechazo post-estructural de la institución, restituimos una reticulación operativa dentro del orden actual. ¿Cómo entonces activamos el espacio público para que a través del arte y la tecnología podamos procurar dialogos críticos que cuestionan la transposición geopolítica y la indentidad cultural, o la falta de ella?

¿Quizas hablamos cuando tengas un minuto? De todos modos, ¡se ve brutal! Break a leg, Luis

From: wodiczko@XXXXXXX.net
Subject: Re: EVIL
Date: March 17, 2005 1:32:35 PM EST
To: indie@MIT.EDU

Please ask Marry. Heller for advice. I am on my way to Basel and Warsaw and it will be difficult to stay in touch with me for the next 11 days. If more people come they can watch the event on the monitor outside the lecture hall if you secure the equipment.

Take care.

Krzysztof

-----Original Message-----

From: Ross Cisneros <indie@MIT.EDU>
Date: Wed, 16 Mar 2005 23:31:36
To: Wodiczko <wodiczko@aol.com>
Cc: Muntadas <muntadas@earthlink.net>
Subject: EVIL

Many people are asking for "tickets". What to do? Many people are traveling far to be here. Should I let people reserve the first 100 seats? What if too many people want to come? please reply soon.

Ross

Sent wirelessly via BlackBerry from T-Mobile.

From: haller@media.mit.edu
Subject: Re: Regarding Evil: Media Alerts etc.
Date: March 18, 2005 11:51:52 AM EST
To: indie@MIT.EDU
Cc: prichards@MIT.EDU

Hi Ross,

Got your message this morning; Patti didn't go out of town after all, and we spoke yesterday and today briefly about this. I think we were waiting to get a "next round" of a media alert from you after the comments in her last attachment. At any rate, I just did a quick rewrite and have sent it over to Patti; will get her comments and send it on to you. Patti and I will also get some press email addresses for you.

One thing I would suggest would be to make the link to the De Lama Lamina press release more prominent in the web site. It's a great description, and I don't want it to get lost or be hard to find (I missed it at first). Perhaps the link on the M.Barney page could

read "'De Lama Lamina' press release," just to make it clear. And perhaps the film title under his name could link to the press release, as well as the listing (De Lama Lamina) on the Schedule of Events?

re: your overflow/simulcast question. yes, you might want to consider this if you're getting a strong response. Michele Oshima (mosh@mit.edu) in our office has dealt with this when presenting visiting artists, and I'm sure she could advise you. She's out of the office today, but you could email her and I'm sure she'll get back to you next week.

Best,
Mary

--

Mary Haller
Director of Arts Communication
MIT Office of the Arts
20 Ames Street, E15-205
Cambridge, MA 02139
617-253-4006
fax 617-258-8631
<http://web.mit.edu/arts>

From: ale.baray@nyu.edu
Subject: Evil Arena
Date: March 21, 2005 12:36:34 PM EST
To: regardingevil-www@mit.edu, regardingevil-www@mit.edu

Hi,
Can you tell me if this will be streaming on the web or if it will be televised anywhere off site?

Many thanks,
Alexander Baray

At 4:46 PM -0500 3/21/05, Ashare, Matt wrote:
I am interested. Who can I contact at MIT to get press credentials for the event?

Thanks,
Matt Ashare
music editor
Boston Phoenix
617-388-6192

-----Original Message-----

From: Roberta Moore [<mailto:roberta@mute.com>]
Sent: Monday, March 21, 2005 2:47 PM

To: mashare@phx.com
Subject: Regarding Evil Summit @ MIT - Sun, April 3

Hello - I'm sending you this because Boyd Rice (AKA NON) is speaking and performing at this summit on Evil hosted by MIT. It looks pretty cool!
Please let me know if you are interested in coverage or if you need more details, please contact the moderator, Ross Cisneros (indie@mit.edu). -Roberta Moore

From: agent.noir@gmail.com
Subject: Regarding Evil - Boyd Rice
Date: March 21, 2005 7:47:07 PM EST
To: regardingevil-www@mit.edu

My dear MIT webmaster:

I am very interested to see your "Regarding Evil" Summit and the inclusion of Boyd Rice is an extreme pleasure for me. I am a media representative for the Church of Satan and, as such, I thought I might clear up one error on your site. In the description you give of Mr. Rice, you state that "Boyd Rice...was appointed High Priest in the Church of Satan by the late Anton LaVey..." This information is incorrect. Boyd Rice was appointed as a Priest in the Church. There is only one High Priest and that is currently Mr. Peter H. Gilmore of NYC.

I thought you'd want to present the most accurate and up-to-date information on this event and I look forward to seeing what becomes of it.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at: agent.noir@gmail.com

Thank you.

~Agent Raymond Noir

FROM BOYD RICE

R--- the "hallways of always". he says he's spent most of his life walking back & forth up & down hallways. i assume that's what it might mean. i think i sent the stuff Thursday or Friday & assumed you'd get it today. i'm going to have brian clark forward to you an unpublished account of my time with manson, it may give you some grist for the mill...
all the best, boyd

R--- great! maybe you could pitch this performance as a celebration of the luciferian/promethean character of war. an exploration of the nexus where black magic & science intersect. & sure, i'd be up for interviews. best, boyd PS, the text brian will be sending is titled " i'll call you abraxas"... it was Manson's nickname for me. brian's a late

sleeper, but i assume you'll get the thing today.

From: rosalie@gladstonegallery.com

Subject: Re: Evil Info

Date: March 22, 2005 3:14:40 PM EST

To: indie@mit.edu

Thanks, it looks awesome!

I didn't realize Manson was participating. Letters between the two of you?? I don't think there's any way MB can go, because I think he'll be in San Francisco editing, but I forwarded this to him.

All best, Rosalie

On 3/22/05 2:57 PM, "Ross Cisneros" <indie@MIT.EDU> wrote:

Hey there...check out the website below and poster. Also, if Matt has the time to come, I'll set him up- Michel Gondry might be here with his kid.

See you!

Ross

<http://web.mit.edu/evil>

Ross

It sounds great. I will try to go. I was there last month because Pavel Braila had a show there. Now, I m working as Associate Director at Yvon Lamber gallery in NY which is wonderful. please call me if you come to the city.

be well

Luisa

FROM OLIVER LUTZ

yo

just got back in town. made the changes 2 the website. i had a dream 2 nights ago that you offered me a lamb. last night i dreamt of rituals that involved the alignment of the sun, depth-of-field settings on a microscope, scholars dressed in black, and the whole thing ended in a widespread revolution in which everybody was clacking together wooden sticks like heavy-metal drummers.

r u around?

o

Quoting Ross Cisneros <indie@MIT.EDU>:

To Oliver Lutz

The title for my presentation (unless you think they'll shoot me) is
"ETHICS BORE ME TO DEATH"
then below it....
HOST/INTERLOCUTOR

From: mjr17@duke.edu

Subject: Re: EVIL

Date: March 25, 2005 4:04:01 PM EST

To: indie@MIT.EDU

Wonderful! Thank you so much. Actually I will be coming with another colleague--
would it be possible to reserve two seats under my name? Looking forward to seeing
your interesting work!

all the best,

Mitali

Mitali J. Routh

Department of Art & Art History

Duke University

Tel: (919) XXX-XXXX

Dear Mr. Cisneros,

I am writing because I am interested to attend your Regarding Evil event on April
3rd. Should I be able to attend I will be coming a long way, as I am a doctoral student
at Duke University. Could you tell me whether the event is open to the public and
whether tickets are needed? Any information you can offer will be greatly
appreciated.

all the best,

Mitali

On Mar 24, 2005, at 11:20 AM, Ross Cisneros wrote:

I have noted your name and distance traveled. The event is free and open to the public on a first come first serve basis- however, I have considered your circumstance among others and will be reserving a seat for you.

Thank you for your interest.

Mary, (Mary Haller MIT)

If you didn't hear anything from me than don't trust it- this has become a free for all as rumor mill complete with people who just have stopped speaking to me. Oh well.

The Pheonix has it as an Editor's pic, The Village Voice is doing a piece in Weds. issue, 2 radio stations will be doing interviews on Sat., Art Forum.com will to a piece, and some "high profile" people will indeed be there but I wouldn't dare say who. I can't afford a simulcast. Just came down to money--- unfortunately if there are crowds, they will have to be turned away.

I have had several press releases tailored to different industries... so here is one of them

Thanks for ALL your help in this.

Best,

Ross

From Robert Rindler

Hi Ross...I just received this message. Congratulations...it looks like a terrific event.

I will not be able to be there unfortunately, but it will clearly be my loss.

I am so pleased to see the events you are involved with, and the success you have achieved since leaving Cooper.

All best wishes, and please keep in touch.

Bob Rindler

From Beau Friedlander

Ross: There's no easy way to say this. Some issues have cropped up that make it impossible for me to come Sunday. I've got to bow out. I'm really sorry, but there's no way around it. I wish I could be there. I know this isn't ideal timing. Again, I'm sorry. I hope the day exceeds your wildest expectations.

Regretfully,

Beau

Ross Cisneros wrote:

Beau,

This is certainly unfortunate. I have cancelled all reservations for hotel and dinners. Should you receive an honorarium receipt electronically, please ignore. Your name has appeared in several ads, articles, etc. I hope that you are okay with that as it is too late to retract your name as a participant.

I do hope that these issues you speak of are not grave-

Best wishes,

Ross

From: desobdc@hotmail.com
Subject: 'Regarding Evil' - any events online?
Date: March 28, 2005 3:56:33 PM EST
To: indie@mit.edu
Hello,

Congratulations for this remarkable initiative.
It will be any online program during April 3rd?

Thank you for the attention.

Bruno de Carvalho
Rio de Janeiro - Brasil

www.desobdc.hpg.com.br

From Velma
Dear Ross:

Thank you for the information. I hope to make the session this Sunday.

If you could tell me who is coordinating the event - the department or coordinator - I would greatly appreciate it; as my international research focus is on abuse-related issues, in collaboration with the World Health Organization, and local, state, and national entities in the US. This project is currently in preparation for piloting in the Middle East.

Best,

Velma

From Alex Lee

Dear Ross,

Can you give me directions on how to get to MIT this w-e?
I'd like to attend the conference and see the screening.

Please let me know.

Best,

Alex

Hi Ross,

I have been asked by my editor at Frieze, James Trainor, to cover the "Regarding Evil Conference" on this Sunday. Do you have additional press material that you can give me and maybe have a seat for me near the front?

Best,

Francine Koslow Miller

From Velma

That's a very unique and fascinating approach to "evil" - through architecture... There's a lot to be said for architectural decision-making by authorities when abuse-related issues are perpetuated by persons using architectural structures. There are also very healing structures... I hope to be able to attend your summit, and bring a friend - not sure who yet... either an artist or a veteran.

- Velma

More from Velma

I am positive that architecture has so much to do with inspiration for communities, and culture. This is a very interesting area - something I have been thinking about in abstract, but not something I had been able to really put into words. However, I believe now I can... you have a great power for inspiration through your work.

I've attached a series of Arts & Humanities Program applications which are currently in process of working proposal with a series of groups. The Visual Arts component is something that is of high-level interest for youth and veteran populations.

One of the Session Leaders, Ariel Freiberg, is a professional artist preparing to work with children. Especially for children who are victims/witnesses of domestic violence, I believe that envisioning architecture and building sculptures (with more than just those tongue-depresser things) would be therapeutic; providing youth with a way to re-build their concepts of what home-life should be like.

I am currently working with the New England Shelter for Homeless Veterans, who is also interested in the Visual Arts component of the Arts & Humanities Program. Certainly, in the military - veterans are trained to destroy, but are exposed to a great deal of cultural architecture abroad... As they re-build their lives, it's possible that I can incorporate architecture into the workshop - through exploring architectural structures through slides, "field-trips" around Boston, and even building their own structures.

In terms of culture - I always observe architecture under psychosocial analysis. You can see my basis for analysis at www.absnetwork.org, on the "Culture" page. The site is under re-construction... so beware of the typical mess that construction makes.

Then - most importantly concerning "Evil"... I was referred to attend your session because I am approaching the issue in clinical, research, intervention, and military projects. This is such a controversial area - that the attached brief criteria of "Abusive Behavioral Syndrome" is under observation by the American Psychiatric Association, but because of political issues and lack of policy in systemic approaches to abuse-related issues; I have approached the international authority and achieved their support - World Health Organization, Geneva.

My work is based on clinical and field research under concepts for Expressive Arts Therapies (www.lesley.edu); through which I should be able to go to Israel in the next few years to begin the intervention and military programs in the Middle East...

EVIL LERKS....

Please also add Miguel Angelo Rivera (miguelangelo_rivera@msn.com) to the list. He will be attending with me. He is a veteran of the US Army, and artist, and works with me.

I look forward to meeting you!

Velma

A forwarded message from Caroline Jones to John Doe

I doubt the man himself is going to be here, but i just wanted to make sure you knew about the Barney screening this weekend. particularly since I will be out of town & can't go. I must say, I wonder how "the hell" he got funding for this, in these particular times.

xox, C

Letter from Ross

Beau,

Being that you have made 4 newspapers, the Voice, and several websites- I feel like you should provide me a statement as to the reasons (which will need to be beefed up a bit) why you chose not to come. People will be expecting you and I will be left flat-footed when the questions come. Please provide this as a courtesy- I don't want to make something up.

From Beau Friedlander

Ross

The bottom line is I messed up, Ross, and I'm very sorry. I had not gone through the final correspondence since I broke contact with Kaczynski six years ago, nor had I thought much about it since then. It did not occur to me when we were talking about your event, but upon looking over those letters it was clear that I was still personally obligated by an understanding between Kaczynski and me that I would not discuss publicly what I learned about him during the process of working on his memoir.

I'm sorry I can't offer you more; that's the sum of it. Perhaps I should have just called in sick, but lying's not my bag.

Best of luck on Sunday. I'm sure the conference will be a great success.

From Raphael, Zurich

Dear Ross Cisneros

Thanks to E-Flux I got the attention on your symposium with the title "Regarding Evil". Unfortunately I couldn't attend it because we had an opening in the museum this weekend. At the moment I'm doing some research to this subject and the aesthetics of evil.

Is there any further information about the symposium? Or would it be even possible to get the papers from the contributors?

Thanks a lot in advance for your help!!!

Best wishes, Raphael.

Raphael Gyga
Assistant Curator
migros museum für gegenwartskunst
Limmatstrasse 270
Postfach 1766
CH-8005 Zürich

T. +41 44 277 20 65

F. +41 44 277 62 86

www.migrosmuseum.ch

more from Raphael

Dear Ross

Thanks - I think a documentation could help me a lot. At the moment I'm doing a long-term research about this subject - and (hopefully) in the end there will be an exhibition about it. But at the moment it's not scheduled. I think the show will really need a good theoretic fundament especially in this time with all this pretty "goth"-art.

If you should be in Zurich one time - we could maybe have coffee or something.

Cisneros,

My name is Josh Berman and I work on the Weekend America Web site.

I was wondering if you had visuals we could feature on our Web site related to your Manson interview or your "Regarding Evil" project.

We air this Saturday so we're a bit pressed for time.

I already have a link to your exhibit Web site, so if you have anything to add, please let us know.

Cheers,

-----< Josh Berman >---

Web Producer
Marketplace Productions
261 S. Figueroa Street
Suite 200
Los Angeles, CA 90012
PH: (213) 621-3576
FX: (213) 607-1537

From NPR

Thanks Ross.

I finally got a hold of the studio, and unfortunately the earliest they can do it is 2 pm tomorrow (Fri). I'm still trying to find a way to record you earlier, but this may be our only option.

Just in case, can you let me know if this time works for you?

I'll get back in touch via email if I find a way to do it earlier.

In meantime, the studio is at 890 Commonwealth Ave. The entrance is actually on St. Paul. It's on the 3rd floor. If you need to get further directions, call the front desk at (617) 353-0909.

Talk to you soon.

Krissy

To Whom It May Concern:

I was writing to see if there was going to be any transcript, video, or notes gathered from the summit discussion made available to the public.

Thank You,
Adam

From: "Dean, Jodi" <JDEAN@hws.edu>
Date: April 7, 2005 5:53:26 PM EDT
To: <julian@bigroom.net>, <dr.jones@o-b-o-k.com>
Cc: "Dean, Jodi" <JDEAN@hws.edu>
Subject: aftermath of evil

Julian and Ron,

It was great to meet you both last weekend at MIT. I learned a lot--and got a new appreciation for contemporary art! I'm writing to give you a little news of some post-evil aftermath. Wednesday morning I awoke to find my blog (icite) overrun with neo-Nazi comments. One of the neo-Nazis in the audience (at least one) was an authentic neo-Nazi. He posted a review of the summit on an anti-Semitic hate site, including a link to icite. A known (there's info about him on the web) neo-Nazi agitator, Bill White, decided to harass me--and did, posting lots of anti-Semitic, anti-liberal, anti-academic, and anti-woman remarks. He also devoted a couple of posts to criticizing me personally, and bodily (bimbo, whore, that sort of thing). Another white supremacist hate type posted this morning. I've blocked Bill White and will block the other guy if he comes back. The uncomfortable thing is that I can tell that people are coming over from the neo-Nazi site to look things over--so I don't know when more sorts of comments will reappear. It's unsettling--especially for a little theory blog. So, maybe something like evil was summoned.

(By the way, Ross and I've talked about it and Boyd sent me an email saying that he

has encountered the same harassment from the left.)

take care,
Jodi

From Frieze writer

Hi Ross,
thanks for all the great pictures. can you give me photo credits. Also, why was Barney's film included (what was the link between his film and the rest of the conference)and why wasn't he there? Also what happened to Beau Friedlander?

best,
Francine

From educator

Hi Ross,

Just writing to say what a great symposium 'Regarding Evil' was...you did a great job. I loved Boyd Rice's attitude and Ronald Jones' presentation was thorough.

I was wondering if you have a DVD or VHS of the day? I teach art at SMFA and part-time at a local high school and would love to show parts of the conference to some of my classes. Is there a way for you to do this? I am willing to send you the DVDR if you need them. Everything will be credited accordingly as well...no gimmicks here.

Let me know what you think. Thanks.

Sincerely,
Gerald Rojek

Ross,

Thanks for the reply. I'm mostly interested in the Ronald Jones piece for an arts and ethics unit for a foundation visual studies course I'm co-teaching next year. I'd like to air it during class here at SMFA. Right now I don't have a syllabus done to know when but I know I sure would like to use it.

Of course, I wouldn't mind a tightened version of the whole conference but for now I would be happy just with the RJ part. If you put it on a DVDR that would be nice.

My address is:

Gerald Rojek

Also, by the way, what exactly is your job or role at MIT? What subject do you teach?

Sincerely,
Gerald Rojek

-----Original Message-----

From: Ross Cisneros [mailto:indie@MIT.EDU]

Sent: Wednesday, April 13, 2005 5:50 PM

To:xxxxxxxxxxxx

Subject: Good and Evil

I friend in LA sent me this link to a show he worked on.

<http://www.nbc.com/Revelations/>

The show is called REVELATIONS.

NBC! I feel like this is going to be the most watched program in the States- if you notice on the website, characters are categorized as "Believers" and "Non-Believers" Of course, the protagonist is a Harvard Prof. and the antagonist is a Nun. Christendom, Religion, Doom, God, Us, Them, Good, Evil. Sounds like the transpolitical strategy of today... or proof of a genius collaboration between Hollywood and the White House.

The End Is Near.... and its outrageous.

Ross

From Eduardo, Portugal

Greetings.

Although I was unable to attend personally the last April 3rd "Regarding Evil" conferences, i'm greatly interested in its results. Is there any publication covering the presentations of the invited speakers being scheduled for publication in the near future? If not, are you able to make available any documentation of the contents exposed in the conferences, be it text, video or audio?

Thank you very much.

Best wishes,

Eduardo Abrantes

Executive Editor
N_NÚMEROMAGAZINE_PORTUGAL

From Richard, Publisher (dis)information press

Thanks Ross. Nice chatting with you, I look forward to seeing your manuscript.

Here is the address again:

Richard Metzger
The Disinformation Company Ltd.

Best,

Richard

Glad you enjoyed our work. Be looking forward for your proposal. Lets keep in touch.

Very best wishes,

Eduardo Abrantes

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From Eduardo

"Your conference project (which i learned of in the supremely useful e-flux newsletter...) interested me not only for its scope and theme, but also for the practical results it might produce. For instance we'd be very interested in publishing a piece, perhaps in visual/text essay form that could encapsulate some of the questions raised. Would something like this interest you? Do keep me informed about your ongoing effort to compile and edit some select material on the event."

From Ross

I just received the materials you sent- very generous...thank you! I will look over it all in the next week. Also, I have mentioned the package to others at MIT to look over. As to the above proposal, I believe we could organize something interesting for print- and now

that I have a feel for your aesthetic, I can fine-tune it for your audience. I will stay in touch about this.... give me a week or so- and thanks again for the great material.

All the best,

Ross

From Ross

Great, Boyd wants to stay at my house so that he's closer to his son. Is he someone I'd want to have waffles with?

From Julian

Your dancing with the devil now Dr. Faustus
On Feb 16, 2005, at 4:59 PM, Ross Cisneros wrote:

From Roberta Moore, Mute Records

Hello Ross and Boyd -

I have two interview requests. I spoke to Boyd and Saturday around 5pm might work the best as Boyd gets in around 3pm. Do you have any plans for him? Would this be okay?

The first is with Brainwashed.com which i forwarded to you the details. Jon Whitney would like to interview Boyd and also film his contribution during the event. The interview and performance would then be available on the site which is highly visited for this genre. Jon would meet Boyd at his hotel and could do the interview in Boyd's room or in the lobby if it's quiet enough. Wherever Boyd feels comfortable...

The next interview is at WMBR - the MIT campus station who has been very supportive of Boyd's work over the years. It looks like the hotel is on campus or nearby. The contact is Patrick Bryant.

I would have Patrick (or a rep from the station) pick up Boyd at this hotel at 5:30pm (Boyd can meet him in the lobby) and escort him to the radio station. If it's live (I'm finding out) - it would be good publicity on the event. You might want to join him and give some background on the event.

Each interview would take 20 minutes or so... I would estimate he would be finished by 6:30pm at the latest.

Let me know your feedback!

--

roberta moore
national director of media relations @ mute

Response to Jodi from Boyd Rice

J--- i was saddened & dismayed to hear about your situation. although i am utterly apolitical, due to some harsh opinions held by me i have long been deemed a "Nazi" by certain factions of people who don't bother to look beneath the surface of things. most people are able to contextualize some of my more seemingly extreme viewpoints, but there will always be some at either end of both political extremes who either can't do that or simply don't care to. i have put up with similar threats & name calling from the far left for years, & even though they imagine themselves to be the good guys, their actual behavior is identical. it's cowardly & thuggish. if i have an issue with someone i tell them to their face, but this sort of person doesn't want a discourse obviously. they need an enemy, someone who can be the villain so that they can wear the white hat. i really enjoyed meeting you, & even though we may not see eye to eye on a good many things, i never take it personally when a person's ideology differs from mine. in fact, i find it mind boggling that anyone out there doesn't expect to encounter as many differing opinions as there are human beings. perhaps this is my last vestige of misguided idealism, as experience has shown me time & time again that a lot of humans thrive upon irrationality. indeed, i've spent years investigating the dark side of humanity & don't expect to it's influence on our history diminished any time soon. at any rate, it's been my experience that the sort of person who gets angry over a mere idea or statement of opinion is someone out of step with the real world. they are capable of sending anonymous emails or calling in a bomb threat & derive enough emotional satisfaction from the act of expressing their rage that that's as far as it goes. let's hope that's the case here. wishing you all the best, boyd

PHOTO FILE

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(BOTTOM).....p.179

POPE JOHN PAUL II.....p.181



REGARDING EVIL

A SUMMIT



MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

CONTRIBUTORS

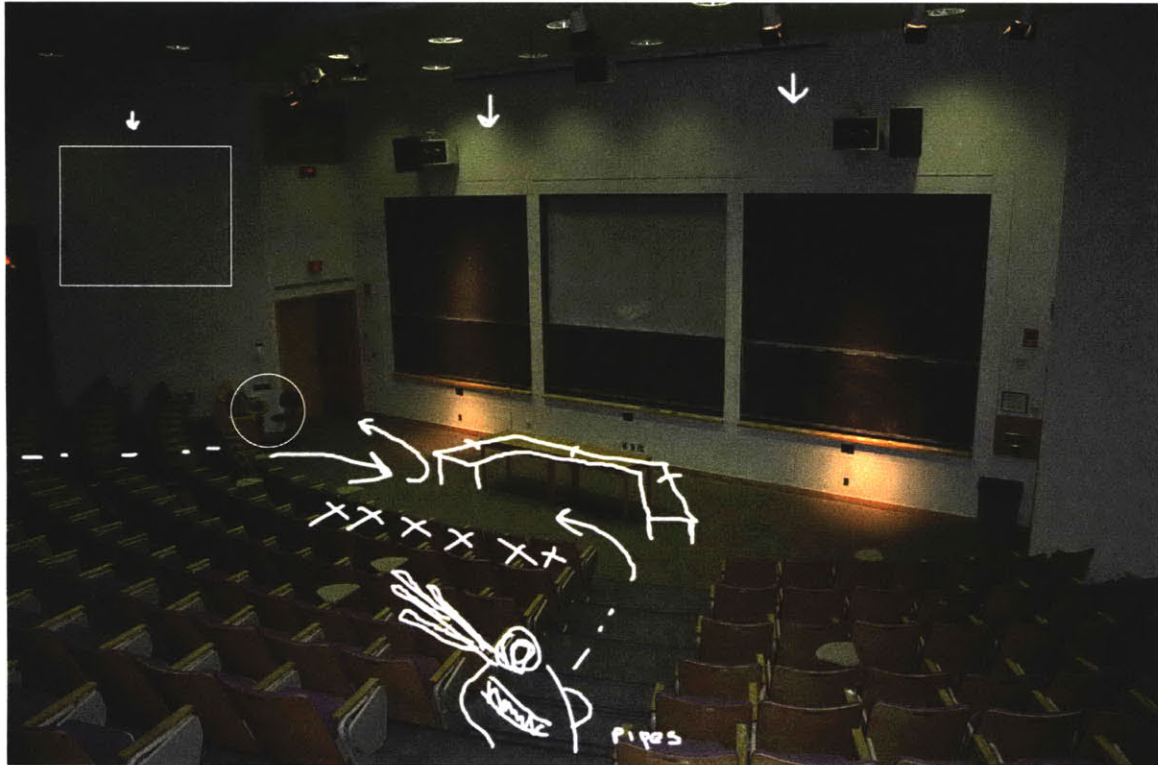
MATTHEW BARNEY | ROSS CISNEROS | JODI DEAN | RONALD JONES
JULIAN LAVERDIERE | CHARLES MANSON | BOYD RICE

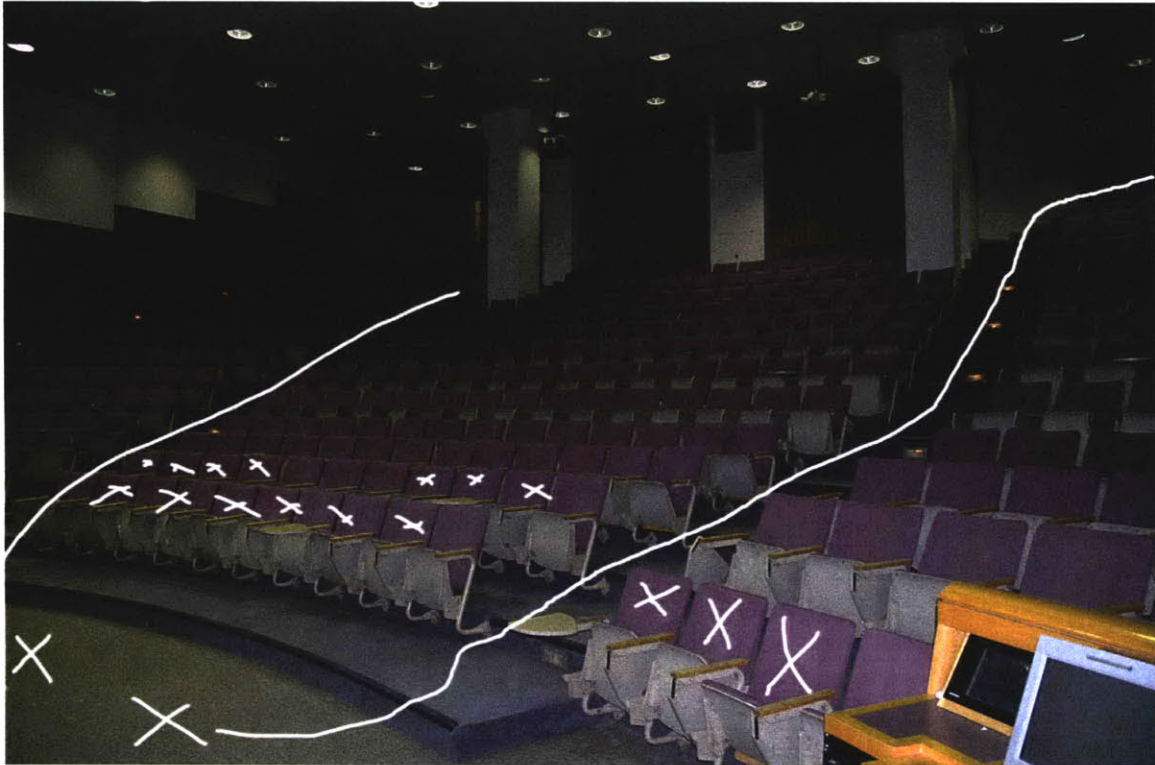
3 APRIL 2005 | 11AM–4:30PM | RM10-250



Event is a part of the Summit for the MIT at MIT

[HTTP://WEB.MIT.EDU/EVIL](http://web.mit.edu/evil)

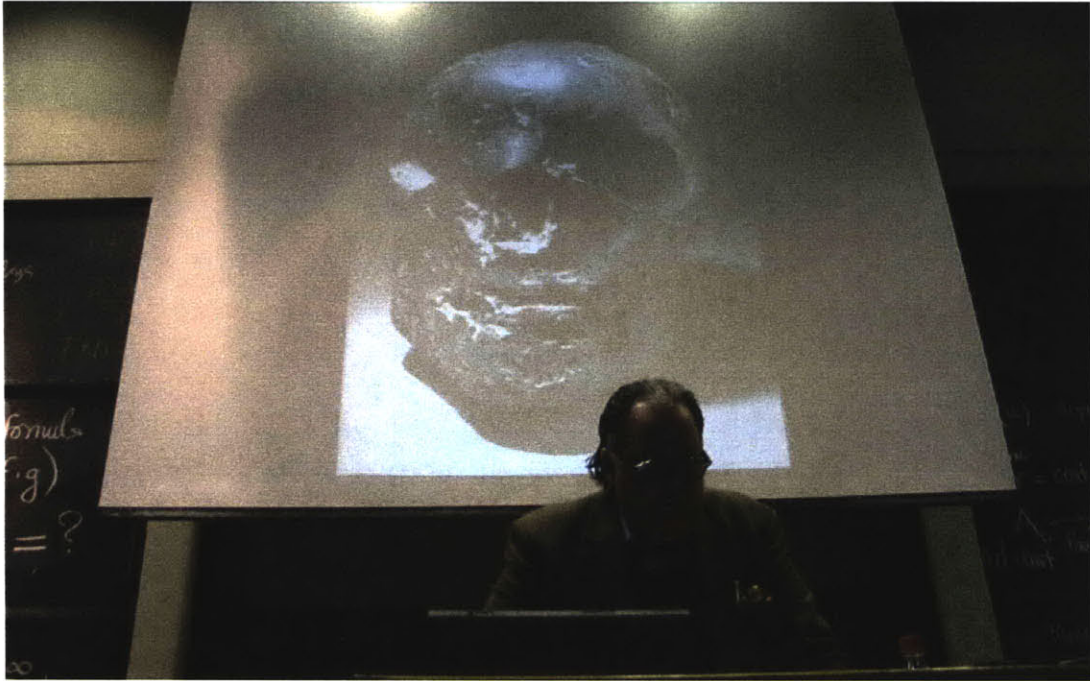






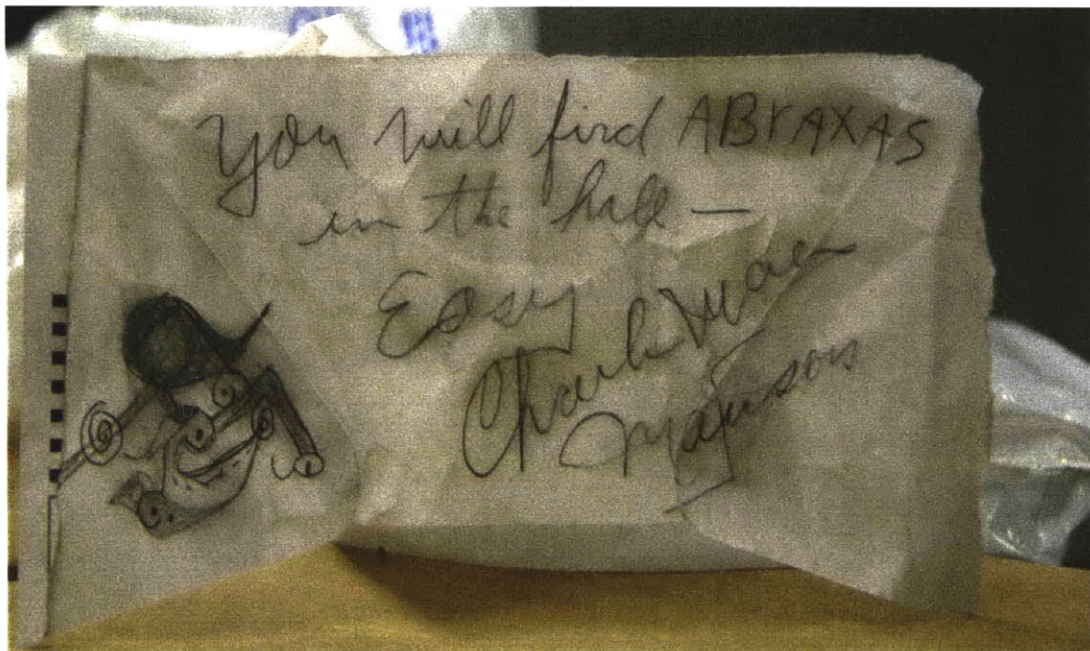










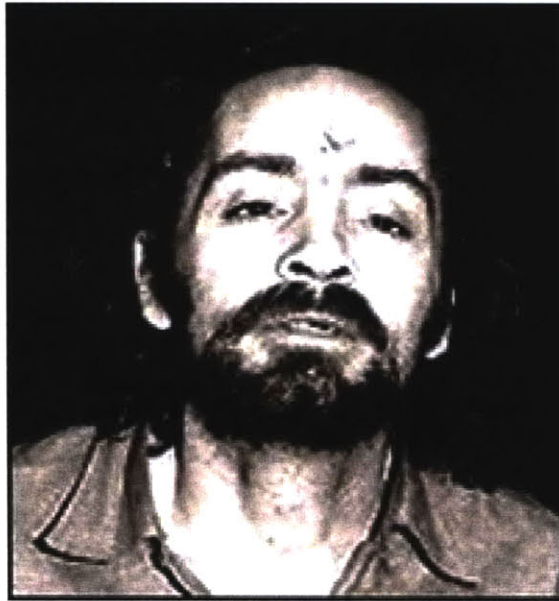




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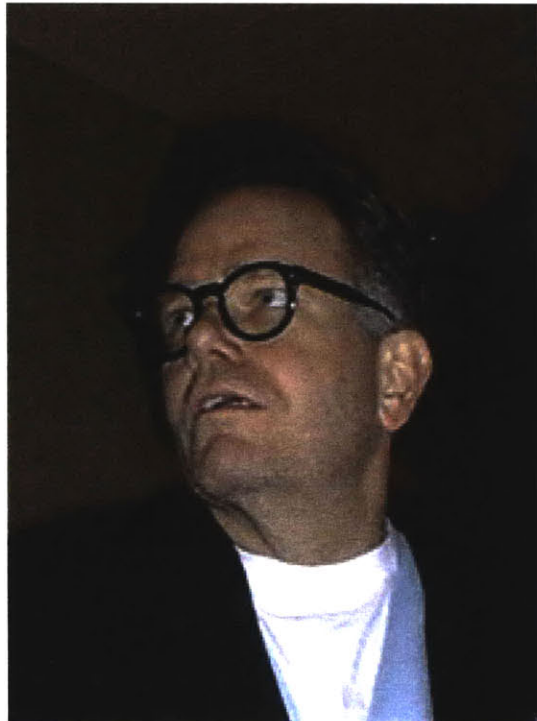
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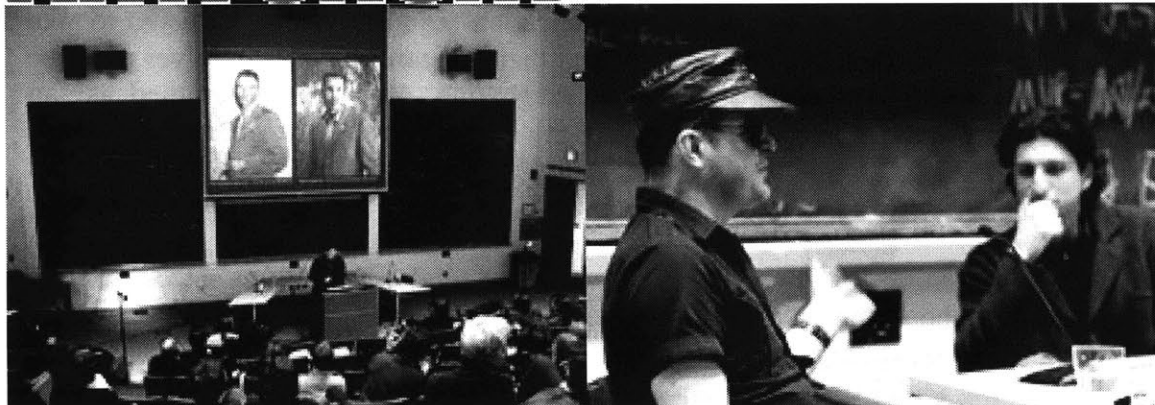
"HOLDIN' OVER THE DEVIL I KNOW/HOLD MY TROUBLES AND HANG ON YOUR TRIGGER"*

Wicked good fun

This Sunday, April 3, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology will be taken over by a cadre of dark-minded folk for REGARDING EVIL, a transnational summit (see web.mit.edu/evil). Star guests include artist MATTHEW BARNEY (sans hooves, we suspect); political theorist JODI DEAN; BEAU FRIEDLANDER, a noted authority on Unabomber Ted Kaczynski; and BOYD RICE—musician and priest of Anton LaVey's Church of Satan. The organizers promise visual stimuli, discursive content, and audience participation. Their thesis is that the Other Side and *Our Town* are conceptually closer than most of us care to believe. "Regarding Evil" is free and open to the public, so anyone—or anything—might show up. WILL WELCH



ARTFORUM



Left: Julian LaVerdiere. Right: Boyd Rice and Ross Cisneros.

All told, Cambridge's summit on evil last Sunday turned out to be good. Budding Gnostic and MIT graduate student Ross Cisneros, one of six candidates in the institute's visual-art program, had convened "Regarding Evil," bringing together a "wise clergy" (in his words) that included natty artists Ronald Jones and Julian LaVerdiere; bespectacled political scientist Jodi Dean; black-clad, snuff-taking, muscle-bound musician, Church of Satan associate, and Charles Manson friend Boyd Rice; and the presence of Manson himself (in the form of two incoherent missives written from prison). Matthew Barney and Arto Lindsay's new film on the Brazilian Carnival, *De Lama Lamina*, 2005, received a special screening at the seven-hour event. Pale undergraduates, hipsters, people who wanted to learn about Abraxas, a surprising number of art addicts from New York, and faculty members (sitting with arms crossed in the back) made up the near-capacity crowd.

Introduced by Cisneros as an experimenter with some of "the world's most questionable egos," LaVerdiere presented almost his entire body of work, including *The First Attempted Manned Space Flight (the Vindication of Werner Von Braun)*, a work that involved research into the US government's rehab of the Third Reich-trained father of the American space program. This project also revealed that a ten-year-old New Jersey boy pictured shaking hands with von Braun under the header "Young American meets his hero" was none other than Jeffrey Deitch. Next, with his back turned to the audience, Rice shouted Aleister Crowley's incantation to the devil into a microphone over a rhythmic roar of maw-of-hell, beyond-industrial music and returned trembling to his seat. Though more or less awkward and simulated, it nonetheless came across as a manifestation of the thing itself about which everyone else was merely talking. When Dean took the stage immediately afterward, academic convention sealed over this fissure as if it never happened. In a fascinating analysis of the Big E's invocation in presidential inaugural speeches from FDR on, she arrived at how George W. Bush's use of evil grounds his "conviction effect." "Now we are seeing absolutism through the lens of relativism," she said, "and invoking 'evil' registers an intensity of belief amongst many individual beliefs."

Jones, flown in from Sweden, told us how Christian belief links the existence of evil to free will: Without evil there would be no opportunity to exercise moral choice. For scientists, the "step from contemplation to application" can involve the decision to take millions of lives; for artists, Jones noted calmly, that step rarely if ever involves a choice of similar weight. That's why, since Saint Augustine, art has been framed as "an unserious matter"; and, instead of rethinking the situation from the ground up, artists (said Jones, touching his laptop to project Serrano's *Piss Christ*) are too often distracted by "protecting their effete privilege to scandalize."

Later, after screaming briefly at us ("Do you want total war?") Rice sat down with Cisneros to talk about ideas ("total opposition to two thousand years of Judeo-Christian tradition"), pranks (handing a skinned sheep's head to Betty Ford), and friendship with Manson (reading aloud from his letters, Rice did quite a Manson impression). After a short, contentious panel discussion focusing mostly on Jones's provocations, the new Barney/Lindsay flick began to unspool, showing an Ogun-figure (a Candomble deity), naked but accessorized with a beak and a "root-vegetable butt plug" (as a friend put it later), strapped below the spinning axle of a giant, rusty float in the midst of the drumming crowds at Carnival. The film shifts between his activities (he slowly wraps the axle in wads of slimy cotton to create a masturbation aid, then uses it, penis flopping unwatchably right and left); those of a silent, shaggy woman who builds a kind of harness/jail for herself in a tree, à la environmental activist Julia Hill; and the crowd and musicians, including the sweating, lantern-jawed Lindsay himself, singing hoarsely in Portuguese. Talking to Bennett Simpson the next day (who had written a piece on the project) I came around to seeing the "unsublimated" nature of this new Barney as kind of interesting: good-dirty. Certainly, it bolstered the impression that Cisneros's conception of evil as a kind of pre- or para-Judeo-Christian magic or life force, inextricably woven into all that is good, was the reading that won the day.

—Larissa Harris



March 31, 2005



What is about this time of year that makes us so mischievous? Is it just the long-standing tradition of April fools jokes? Is it the emergence of somewhat decent weather? Or are we Evil? Maybe these aren't the questions MIT has in mind, but they are holding a summit on the topic of evil all day Sunday. They'll be chatting about ethics, politics, Ted Kaczynski, and the Church of Satan. Some Boston-area bloggers don't think it will be evil enough, but we'll find out. Bostonist will be squirming in our seats waiting for the Matthew Barney/Arto Lindsay film at 3:20. De Lama Lamina was done for the Carnaval de Salvador last year. Bostonist can best describe it as a parade float accompanied by lots of drummers. We're hoping to catch a glimpse of Bjork's man in person, and ask him what he thinks of the Bjorkestra. What is about this time of year that makes us so mischievous? Is it just the long-standing tradition of April fools jokes? Is it the emergence of somewhat decent weather? Or are we Evil? Maybe these aren't the questions MIT has in mind, but they are holding a summit on the topic of evil all day Sunday. They'll be chatting about ethics, politics, Ted Kaczynski, and the Church of Satan. Some Boston-area bloggers don't think it will be evil enough, but we'll find out. Bostonist will be squirming in our seats waiting for the Matthew Barney/Arto Lindsay film at 3:20. De Lama Lamina was done for the Carnaval de Salvador last year. Bostonist can best describe it as a parade float accompanied by lots of drummers. We're hoping to catch a glimpse of Bjork's man in person, and ask him what he thinks of the Bjorkestra.

BAD TO THE BONE
Truly wicked pissah at MIT
BY MIKE MILIARD



It's Dr. Evil. I didn't spend six years in Evil Medical School to be called "mister," thank you very much.

— Dr. Evil, *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery*

At 11 a.m. last Sunday, as millions entered churches to pray for the soul of Pope John Paul II, I ventured instead to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to spend six hours studying the ways of evil. A symposium moderated by artist, writer, and MIT alum Ross Cisneros, "Regarding Evil" gathered scholars, theorists, musicians, and a satanic priest to confront the "elusive and immeasurable subject of evil, its transpolitical behaviors, charismatic aesthetic, and viral dispersement in the vast enterprise of simulation, symbolic power, and catastrophe." It sounded like tons of fun.

For the record, Cisneros told the almost-full auditorium, "I am not in praise of evil." His audience didn't look particularly iniquitous, either. In addition to the gathered academics, however, Cisneros had invited Charles Manson to participate. Alas, Manson was indisposed. But in response to Cisneros's letter requesting his thoughts on evil, Manson sent a missive of his own. "You're no faker," Cisneros read from the scrawled note. "A cat, a rat, big brain, little brain. It was a big ship. And, if your friend sank the *Titanic*, well, let's see. They will shut you out if you get close, but you don't want to play dumb. Ching a ling a bling blong." The students took notes.

The more coherent presenters approached the pervasive problem of evil in unorthodox and illuminating ways. Artist Julian LaVerdiere, who helped conceive the World Trade Center

"Towers of Light" tribute, described seeing his studio on the 91st floor of Tower One obliterated, and, later, watching his commemorative project being co-opted as political propaganda (appearing on right-wing pamphlets and collectible hunting knives). In a talk called "Evil's Political Habitats," Hobart-William Smith politics professor Jodi Dean dissected evil's presence in presidential speeches, noting that in the speeches of George W. Bush, evil flourishes as an abstract force that must be opposed in concrete terms. Ronald Jones, a professor at Konstfack University College of Arts, Crafts, and Design, in Stockholm, talked about the intersection of art and evil — like the Nazi crematoriums that were surrounded by peaceful gardens so as to avoid causing "unnecessary alarm" in the victims for whom they provided a last earthly glimpse. Or the "psychotechnic torture" employed by anarchists in the Spanish Civil War, where prison cells were spangled with wild colors, strange shapes, and shifting light in order to make their inhabitants confused and distressed.

The star of this show, though, was Boyd Rice, industrial-music maven, media provocateur, and dabbler in fascism and Satanism. He entered to a cacophonous soundtrack: loud, thrumming, sulphurous drones evocative of subterranean insect swarms or menacing drums rumbling in the distance. *This is what hell sounds like*, I thought. Standing in a severe black shirt, eyes hidden behind obsidian shades, he gripped the podium and screamed over the din: "Do you want total war? Turn man into beast once more? Do you want to rise and kill? To show the world an iron will? Do you want total war? Yes you want total war!" The audience sat in stunned silence.

Sitting down afterward, indulging in a nostril of snuff, Rice discussed his attraction to Anton LaVey, the late high priest of the Church of Satan (Satanism is a remedy to a "world corrupted by Judeo-Christian values," of course); the skinned sheep's head he presented to then-first lady Betty Ford (the Secret Service was not amused); and his buddy Charlie Manson's wicked sense of humor ("If he ever got out, he could do stand-up"). After he was joined by the rest of the panel, a discussion ensued about Abraxas, the Gnostic deity who incorporated good and evil. About the weird propensity for failed artists — Manson, Hitler — to become bloodthirsty monsters. About whether the fireballs of 9/11 could be viewed as performance art. (Answer: definitely not. But if the planes had flown *between* the towers, *that* would've been art.)

The day, which by now was severely behind schedule, closed with a screening of Matthew Barney's *De Lama Lamina*, whose precise relation to evil I could not immediately discern. At any rate, I had to leave halfway through, since I was having friends over to watch the Red Sox take on the Yankees. To stare evil in the face, in other words. Evil won, 9-2.

Issue Date: April 8 - 14, 2005



*"Now that **Boyd Rice** is officially on the lecture circuit, he has been invited to participate in a symposium at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on April 3rd, titled "Regarding Evil" (MIT, after all, is the institution of higher learning that gave us the nuclear bomb and napalm)."*

* A .PDF copy of the promotional poster for the event is available
HERE

* For further info, visit the official website for the event here:
Regarding Evil



Yes We Want TOTAL WAR To Throw Out Christ And Bring Back Thor Boyd Rice Lectures At MIT

4/5/2005 10:27:01 PM

Discuss this story in the forum

Trench Coat Jedi

MIT, Massachusetts -- http://www.trenchcoatjedi.com/gallery/view_album.php?set_albumName=album31

**YES WE WANT TOTAL WAR
TO THROW OUT CHRIST AND BRING BACK THOR
Boyd Rice at MIT**
by Mike Z.

A few listservs had mentioned **Boyd Rice** would be participating in a conference called "Regarding Evil" at **MIT**. This sounded highly suspicious to me, more like a prank the former COS spokesperson would pull than a decision that an **MIT** program manager would make. However, it was on their website (<http://mit.edu/evil>) so who am I to question something posted on the internet?

I live not far from Cambridge so I showed up with my friend UK Dan, who was thankfully not the only shaved head in the crowd with a totenkopf T- shirt. The symposium began with some rather extravagant melodrama: full- dressed Scotsman playing taps, lighting effects, and our moderator addressing us in overly florid, dogmatic language ("We are gathered here to question the darkest recesses of the human id, to interrogate the deepest secrets of the human soul, blah blah blah wank wank")

So the first presenter is Julian LaVerdiere, a sculptor/artist who designed the WTC memorial, the Towers of Light. He gave a lucid, fascinating talk about the memorial and his other work which I greatly enjoyed. However, it did have nothing to do with the theme of the conference.

At this point, I noticed **Boyd Rice** in the front row wearing all black, a cargo shirt, leather visor cap, and dark aviators which he did not remove for the entire day. He also never bumped into things or fell down, so he is apparently quite accustomed to wearing sunglasses indoors. **Boyd** was summoned to provide a "musical interlude" at this point, which consisted of him reciting Crowley's "Hymn to Pan" into a reverb box. The line "I rape, I rip, I rend, and I rave" was of course repeated at maximum volume many times as the first ripples of consternation percolated through the crowd.

Did I mention the crowd? About 8 people looked like they were there to see **Boyd** (mohawks, iron crosses, leather jackets) and the rest (about 75) were your typical bright-eyed college dopes and sallow-faced academics. Also bear in mind that Cambridge is the home and ur-source of the world's most over- privileged, effete, and snobbish limousine liberals.

Boyd was seated next to a woman who looked about forty but was dressed like a teenager on her way to a nightclub. I figured this was **Boyd's** consort, so I was quite amazed to hear her introduced as not only our next speaker, but the chair of some no-name college's Political Science department. She revealed that she not only dresses like a bimbo, but pontificates like one as well, giving us a rambling hour-long lecture on how brainless and provincial G.W. Bush is. I love 21st century scholasticism. This was now phase three of the conference and still nobody had touched on the day's topic.

My friend UK Dan woke me briefly during this woman's sermon to tell me he just witnessed **Boyd Rice** tap some substance onto his forearm and snort it up his nose. Come on, I told him, you've gotta be mistaken. Nonetheless, I kept an eye on **Boyd** for a while and sure enough I witness him taking out some ampoule, tapping a powder onto his forearm and unmistakably snorting it in the **MIT** ampitheater!

When Buffy the Bush Slayer finally wrapped up her litany of liberal drollery, UK Dan and I cavorted up to **Boyd Rice**, shared some small talk, and casually asked what he had been inhaling. He claims it was snuff tobacco and "gives you one hell of a rush." Take that any way you want. We commiserated over the vapidty of the last speaker and **Boyd** made my day by admitting he's never voted in his life but registered in '04 just to put in a ballot for W.

We went out for lunch and missed the third speaker who was some Swedish Art Professor. We re-entered just in time for **Boyd's** session. The NON rune with the Orobouros was projected magnificently over the lecture hall (see photos), the lights dimmed and he started off with "Do you want TOTAL WAR? Yes, you want TOTAL WAR..." After a long, awkward silence, our mediator begins a Q&A session with **Boyd**, who answers flippantly, swears, and brags about stealing supplies from CA warehouses with Mark Pauline. Just as the mediator is starting to realize the awful mistake he made in inviting **Boyd Rice** to participate in an academic conference, **Boyd** brings his little box back out, taps out some powder, and snorts a line IN FRONT OF A LIVE COLLEGE AUDIENCE.

Everyone is too shocked to react, but the SECOND TIME he does it, the mediator stops mid-sentence and nervous murmurs permeate the crowd. "It's snuff!" **Boyd** yells. Maybe he thought university speakers casually use tobacco products mid-lecture. Note my photographs of **Boyd Rice** snorting a substance in front of a crowded lecture hall.

The best line of this portion was "I felt drawn to LaVey and the Process Church in the

early 70s since everyone else was preaching love of neighbor ... nobody else was saying you should HATE PEOPLE." I tell you, liberal college tools love hearing lines like that. The mediator brought out the other three speakers for a roundtable discussion. Nobody had any questions for any presenter, so the five began useless bickering over the social purpose of art. **Boyd** continued to charm the crowd by querying whether Barbie Dolls inserted rectally constitute art or not. He plays with his plastic water cup, spins pens in circles, and never removes the aviators.

After the group Q&A, we were privileged to witness the yet-unreleased film from Cremaster Cycle-producer Matthew Barney. This film, "De Lama Lamina" was 50 minutes of latin beats, Brazilian dance, and a nude black man suspended underneath a large truck rubbing his genitals against the rotating driveshaft. The theater was empty when it completed; not only the audience but all of the previous presenters walking out. Even **Boyd** sauntered away after snorting about five more lines and draining a hip flask.

The proposed topic of the symposium, the phenomenology of Evil, had not been brought up.

Mike Z.
livyatan@hotmail.com

[Bill: Read the **MIT** website on this subject. Charles Manson was an invited guest, but apparently he wasn't able to attend from federal prison. These people think evil has something to do with George Bush. What weirdoes.

Here's the website of the badly dressed forty year old:

<http://jdeanicate.typepad.com/>

Her lecture targeting Bush was on "EVIL'S POLITICAL HABITATS". She may be the first speaker ever to choose Bush over "Nazis" as the subject of such a discussion.

I think I'm going to comment on some of her inanities ...]

Emailed to you by:
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<http://66.101.143.208>
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COMPLINE

The methodology of artistic practice proved to have carried me through this course of study in transformative ways and led me to other curious contradictions. The continuous challenging of logic and compulsion are part of my ongoing pursuit of intellectual and moral fitness. Approaching the subjects and objects of Evil in a more direct way can cause an incredible amount of stress, suspicion, fatigue, and disgust. However, it was from the fatigued environment of conventional epistemological strategies, that gather nuts for the paradisial island of academia, that I searched for a radical primary experience as my source for wisdom. I chased after the ghostly subject with a fresh exuberance and sarcasm of a skeptic. Admittedly, I fed the desire to start a war and aspired to control and colonize the native Evil that remained untamed and isolated. Evil as such may not exist in a total sense, but it non-the-less remains suspended in the orbital anxieties of our entire political and social history as the power that charms and betrays.

For Lianne,
The Windrose,
And the Eden

-Emunio Caelum-